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© JANET STRIKE SCHURMAN

PERCEPTIONS OF RESILIENCE OF CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES WHO ARE INVOLVED IN BULLYING

Les perceptions de la résilience des enfants ayant des difficultés d'apprentissage qui sont impliqués dans l'intimidation

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Abstract

Research has shown that bullying is associated with many negative results. Children with learning difficulties who are involved in bullying and those susceptible to victimization may be adversely affected, although environmental resilience can reduce these effects. This study used an eco-systemic approach to explore the perceptions of resilience in some children with learning difficulties who have been involved in bullying. It also aimed to better understand multiple views on the resilience of these students as perceived by parents and school staff. This qualitative study used visual methods and was implemented in a suburban and a rural elementary school with 10 students from grades 5 and 6, their parents, teachers, principals, and other support personnel. Visual storytelling, through pictures and interviews, provided access to important information on the perceptions of the resilience of these students. In addition, parents and school staff were asked to participate in semi-structured interviews to explore their perceptions of resilience in these children who have been involved in bullying. There was evidence that these children had low self-esteem and were socially blind to their actions considered by others to be bullying. However, if given the opportunity to be active, creative, and somewhat autonomous within a structured role, especially in situations that were non-evaluative or when provided with adult assistance, these children were able to access resilience more easily. The need for a special relationship within the school community was central to accessing resilience for the children in this study. Relationship-based activities that empower children appear to be a way to foster resilience within schools, especially for at-risk students involved in bullying.

Keywords: bullying, learning difficulties, visual methods, perceptions, resilience.

Sommaire

La recherche a montré que l'intimidation est associée à de nombreux résultats négatifs. Entre autres, les enfants ayant des difficultés d'apprentissage sont impliqués dans l'intimidation et ceux qui sont sensibles à la victimisation peuvent être négativement touchés, bien que la résilience environnementale puisse diminuer ces effets. Cette étude a utilisé une approche éco-systémique pour explorer les perceptions de la résilience de certains enfants éprouvant des difficultés d'apprentissage dans deux écoles primaires en situation d'intimidation. Elle a visé également à mieux connaître les multiples perspectives sur la résilience de ces élèves telles qu'énoncées par les parents et le personnel scolaire. Ce projet a utilisé des méthodes qualitatives visuelles et était mis en œuvre dans une école primaire de banlieue et une école primaire rurale auprès de 10 élèves de 3^{e} cycle (niveaux 5 et 6), de leurs parents, de leurs enseignant(e)s, de la direction, et des techniciennes qui ont donné le soutien à l'école. La narration visuelle au moyen d'entrevues-photos, permet d'accéder à d'importantes informations sur les perceptions de la résilience de ces élèves. En outre, les parents et le personnel scolaire sont également sollicités pour des entrevues ouvertes afin de découvrir leurs perceptions de la résilience chez ces enfants qui font face à l'intimidation. Il y avait des indications que ces enfants avaient une faible estime de soi et étaient socialement aveugles face aux actions qu'ils posaient que les autres pouvaient interpréter comme de l'intimidation. Cependant, si on leur donnait la possibilité d'être actifs, créatifs et quelque peu autonomes dans un rôle structuré, en particulier dans des situations non évaluatives ou pour lesquelles ils recevaient l'aide d'un adulte, ces enfants pouvaient accéder plus facilement à la résilience. Pour les enfants dans cette étude, une relation spéciale au sein de la communauté scolaire était essentielle pour accéder à la résilience. Les activités fondées sur les relations qui

valorisent les enfants semblent être un moyen de favoriser la résilience au sein des écoles, en particulier pour les étudiants à risque qui sont impliqués dans l'intimidation.

Mots-clés : intimidation, difficultés d'apprentissage, méthodes visuelles, perceptions, résilience

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Perceptions of Resilience of Children with Learning Difficulties Who Are Involved in Bullying

The Office québécois de la langue française (OQLF) and the Quebec Education Act have defined bullying as a form of social violence observed throughout the school milieu, characterised by the domination of one individual over another through repeated acts of verbal, physical, or psychological aggression (OQLF, 2011; in Beaumont, 2012, p. 9; Gouvernement du Quebec, 2015). In research conducted in 36 countries, Craig and Pepler (2003) found that Canadian children rank in the 25th percentile as instigators of bullying and in the 33rd percentile for being bully victims. Under the direction of Claire Beaumont, research was conducted in 125 Quebec elementary schools using surveys to assess the perceptions of students and school personnel regarding aggressive or 'at risk' behaviours at school. There were indications that less affluent neighbourhoods experienced more 'at risk' behaviours. It is important to note that only four of the schools surveyed were Anglophone. She noted that teachers lack specific training in dealing with school violence, and that continuing education is necessary for appropriate interventions (Beaumont, Leclerc, Frenette, & Proulx, 2014).

Among many difficulties that affect children in school, bullying and its consequences are important priorities for school personnel and parents. Several high-profile suicides associated with bullying victimization in differing forms, including online bullying, have motivated governments and communities and have led to close examination of anti-bullying programs as part of system-wide prevention plans. Law 19, « Loi visant à lutter contre l'intimidation et la violence à l'école » has modified the Education Act of Quebec so that there is now an obligation for public and private school institutions to adopt and put into action anti-bullying and anti-violence (ABAV) plans (Projet de loi 56, 2012). To respond more appropriately to the needs of students whose scholastic

performance is compromised, it is important to understand the perspectives of students and school personnel, including their perceptions of resilience, specifically in the context of bullying at school.

In order to ensure that students with significant difficulties receive appropriate support, the ministère de l'Éducation has ensured they are identified according to their needs through the EHDAA (élèves handicapés ou en difficultés d'adaptation ou d'apprentissage); translated as the Organization of Educational Services for At-Risk Students and Students with Handicaps, Social Maladjustments or Learning Difficulties. According to the EHDAA (2007), students who are 'at risk' need particular supports because they show difficulties that may lead to failure at school, learning delays, and emotional and/or behavioural disorders. In practice, this means that a child, who has not met certain requirements (competencies) within an education cycle (a grouping of two grades together; for example, grades one and two) even with support, is considered to be 'at risk' and requires an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) specific to his or her needs. This policy regarding provision of special education services focuses on prevention and intervention on an individual basis (EHDAA, 2007). However, since bullying is considered to be a systemic problem that is best addressed through whole-school programs (Smith, Schneider, Smith & Ananiadou, 2004), Québec's Law 19 appears to be advocating a similar ecological-systemic framework for the intervention and prevention of bullying.

In 2015 the Quebec government published an action plan entitled "Together Against Bullying, A Shared Responsibility" which was developed through collaborative consultations of many ministries and opposition parties. This document extends the responsibility to all environments and populations where bullying occurs. One of the tools recommended is "Ensemble, on s'élève!" under the direction of the Office des personnes handicapées du Québec

(OPHQ) for use in schools and recreational programs. Another initiative focuses on raising awareness of bullying through Quebec's "Santé et mieux- être" portal (Gouvernement du Quebec, 2015). It is not known how children with learning difficulties perceive their abilities to access resources when they have been involved in bullying incidents. At the same time, it is not clear how those closest to them, including their parents and school personnel, perceive these children's resilience in dealing with bullying situations. There has not been much investigation into the relationship between children`s perceptions of resilience and their adjustment, but previous studies have indicated that cultivating resilience in children's environments helps protect them from the negative effects of adverse circumstances and promotes positive growth (Lee, Kwong, Cheung, Ungar & Cheung, 2009). It is therefore proper and timely to research the perceptions of resilience for children with learning difficulties who are often the targeted recipients of anti-bullying programs due to their involvement in bullying.

Theoretical Context

Review of the Literature

Bullying and children with learning difficulties. Health consequences to both bullies and their victims are well documented, and include anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, withdrawal, and suicidal ideation (Smith, Cousins, & Stewart, 2005). In a review of 133 research articles addressing the incidence of bullying of students with learning difficulties, a majority of studies indicated that having a learning difficulty may increase a student's victimization (Mishna, 2003).

Students with difficulties may also be more inclined to bully others, especially after long-term victimization, according to a review of research (Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt & Hymel, 2010). This extensive report (119 articles) suggests that prevention of bullying and intervention

programs need to include not only the individuals affected, but also their peers, their families, their schools and the larger community, because bullying affects the social and emotional development of children as well as their learning. It was also found that a positive school climate was able to reduce the negative effects of bullying (Ibid, 2010).

Chronic victimization has been linked to deficits in emotional regulation, which has been defined as a failure to integrate intra- and inter-personal information needed to develop and implement effective adaptation strategies (Mahady Winton, Craig & Pepler, 2000). In a study that looked at the relationship between children diagnosed with specific language impairment and bullying, Knox and Conti-Ramsden (2007) found the only predictor of vulnerability to bullying was behavioural/social-emotional difficulties. However, a study of grade 5 students found that peer rejection and victimization possibly moderate the negative social impact of language difficulties (Luciano & Savage, 2007). A meta-analysis of 152 research articles found that three-fourths of students with learning difficulties also showed deficits in social skills (Kavale & Forness, 1996). Children with behavioral problems have been found to have deficits in their abilities to interpret emotional signals in their environment; this leads to difficulties in separating concepts associated with bullying, such as whether the child is a bully, a victim, or both (Sofronoff, Dark and Stone, 2010; Son, 2011; Grinberg, Heath and McLean-Heywood, unpublished, McGill University).

A study that looked at 1,389 fifth graders from 35 rural schools across the United States found that school adjustment difficulties were clearest for students identified as bully-victims, who also tended to be students receiving special education services (Brooks, Farmer, Gravelle, Hamm, Lambert, & Petrin, 2012). Despite recognition that students with disabilities are at risk for being bullied or victimising others, only one study which concluded that these children may have been

mis-identified as “bully-victims when, in reality, they are only trying to protect themselves in a manner consistent with their oftentimes limited skills” (Katsiyannis & Maag, 2012; p. 78).

The view that behaviour problems may be adaptive for the child, due to modifiable environmental factors, rather than solely located within a diagnostic of specific pathology, is one of the underlying paradigm shifts of new initiatives to address bullying issues for several English school boards within the Quebec educational system (Heath, Mclean-Heywood, Rousseau, Petrakos, Finn & Karagiannakis, 2006). In their study, children with emotional and behavioural disorders who received support from a team of informed and caring adults were able to function within regular classrooms and had increased self-esteem. The collaborative relationships between family and school personnel also led to increased positive views by parents toward their children (Heath, et al., 2006).

Rose, Monda-Amaya and Espelage (2011) recently reviewed over thirty studies focusing on students with difficulties who have been involved in bullying. They found victimization rates of more than fifty percent, indicating that these students are targets of victimization more often than their non-disabled peers are. Most studies showed an increase in verbal abuse, social exclusion and physical assault for these students and that over time, victims could develop aggressive characteristics as a strategy against victimization. Some researchers suggested that students with difficulties show more bullying behaviors than students without, with between fifteen and forty-two percent of disabled victims showing these behaviours. Disabled victims are often characterized as having poor social skills, poor reading abilities, weak nonverbal communication, few close friends, or friends who are unstable. It seems that if these students have difficulty understanding social cues or do not have strategies to avoid victimization, they become targets of bullying. Despite empirical validation regarding high rates of victimization and

perpetration among students with difficulties, very little research has been conducted on intervention strategies for these specific groups. This deficiency can result in inadequate implementation practices or weak support for students with difficulties who are subjected to bullying. The authors recommend a review of the support systems for victims, and that school prevention programs should be evaluated for their effectiveness in reducing the victimization of students with difficulties (Rose, Monda-Amaya, and Espelage, 2011).

As research has shown that having a learning difficulty and being involved in bullying are both significant risk factors that may have negative effects on success and health outcomes for children, in this study these factors are forms of adversity that children must navigate. As indicated by this literature review, it is not easy to tell if a child who has a learning difficulty is a bully or a victim, because of the high rates of victimization and intimidation behaviors concurrent in this group of students. Indeed, Esplelage and Swearer (2003) advocate abandoning the “dyadic bias” for recognition that bullying and victimization fall along a continuum of behaviours rooted in complex interaction within a specific environment. For this reason, the use of the broader term "involved in bullying" is deemed to be appropriate for this research study, as it does not distinguish between perpetrators and victims, but instead focuses on the vulnerability of students with learning difficulties. Prior research has tended to focus on individual identification of bullies and victims rather than looking at the complex dynamics of relationships especially for children with special needs.

An eco-systemic approach to school prevention programs. An ecological viewpoint in research implies considering not only the student, but also other people and the contexts within which they exist (Sanders & Munford, 2009). As recommended by Bronfenbrenner (1979), researchers seek to understand the positive development of youth at risk through observing,

examining, and analyzing the broader socio-ecological environment within specific cultural contexts. According to Sung Hong and Espelage (2012), the complex interrelationships between the systems such as onto- (the understanding of relationships); micro- (parent-child and peer relationships); and meso- (teacher involvement and understandings) reflect the problems that children involved in bullying experience in many areas.

According to Beaumont (2010), the school is in a privileged position to intervene because it is the most important environment for children after the family. This ecological perspective fosters partnerships with those directly involved in the education of a child, and helps to increase positive engagement that, in turn, tends to lead to higher rates of long-term success for intervention (Trickett and Rowe, 2012; Baker, Derrer, Davis, Dinklage-Travis, Linder and Nicholson, 2001). Since interventions by teachers require awareness that bullying is taking place, their perceptions regarding these students are important aspects to evaluate in the fight against bullying (Rahey & Craig, 2002). On the other hand, increased peer social support has been found to be the most significant predictor of decreased bullying and victimization, for students with and without learning disabilities (Rose, Espelage, & Monda-Amaya, 2013).

Several meta-analyses of studies on the effectiveness of over fifty anti-bullying programs (such as the Olweus Program, Dare to Care, Social Skills Training (SST), Project Ploughshares, Puppets for Peace, and others), have found that intensive programs with consistent discipline policies, where parents are involved and receive training regarding bullying and the school's intervention plans, are effective to decrease bullying and victimisation (Harcourt, Hasperse, & Green, 2014; Mishna, Pepler & Wiener, 2006; Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). Lower levels of victimisation and revenge seeking were found when children sought help from adults (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008). Best practice research indicates that anti-bullying

programs need to include all members of the child's social ecology, including school personnel, family members and the broader community (Espelage & Swearer, 2003).

It is apparent that to be effective, prevention programs need to adapt to the environments and contexts of children in order to increase their resilience in bullying situations (Bowes et al, 2010; Sonoroff, Dark and Stone, 2010; Ungar, 2011). The current study is based on an interactive design, where both individual perceptions and the broader culture of the school are considered in order to promote changes in behavioral functioning throughout the schools as the ABAV plans are implemented (Carlson, Engebretson and Chamberlain, 2006). Additionally, from the literature, it is not clear how the understanding of children involved in bullying differs according to their particular vulnerabilities, and how this might influence the support they receive from parents and school staff. For these reasons, this study was designed to look at children's perceptions of their resilience at school as well as the perceptions of the key people in their immediate environments.

Parent and teacher perceptions regarding bullying. Many parents are not aware that their child is being bullied, as their children do not tell their parents about their involvement (Holt, Kaufman Kantor, Finkelhor, 2009; Sawyer, Mishna, Pepler & Wiener, 2011). Even when parents were aware of bullying, most did nothing to intervene, according to student reports (Brown, Aalsma & Ott, 2013). A study of fifth and sixth grade students at thirty-eight elementary schools in Belgium found that children who were involved in bullying reported weaker attachment relationships with their parents (Stevens, De Bourdeaudhuij & Van Oost, 2002). However, family factors (such as maternal warmth and positive atmosphere at home) provided environmental protection against bullying in a study of 1,116 pairs of twins and their families. Using measures such as Achenbach's (a behaviour rating scale), victims of bullying had lower scores of problem behaviours at 10 to 12 years if they had experienced high levels of warmth from their family

members and a positive atmosphere at home; these effects remained after adjusting for sex, IQ, socioeconomic level, and genetic influences (Bowes Maughan, Caspi, Moffitt & Arseneault, 2010).

Research has shown that it is difficult for parents to identify bullying (Harcourt, Hasperse & Green, 2014). Parents feel they need information on the different forms of bullying, its effects, reliable strategies for dealing with it, and access to supportive school personnel. In several studies, parents reported that they felt that the schools need to take more responsibility for bullying prevention and intervention because when bullying occurs they feel powerless, angry, and guilty that they are not able to protect their children (Brown, Aalsma & Ott, 2013; Harcourt, Hasperse & Green, 2014).

According to Brown and colleagues (2013), contrary to expectations, parents were less likely to report to their school that their child had been bullied when they perceived the school as being safe and supportive, although they reported incidents when bullying interfered with their child's grades, attendance and participation at school. There was a perception, however, that school personnel were unwilling to take these incidents seriously and provide protection to their children; as a result, the researchers concluded that parents experience some traumatic effects from ineffective school responses (Brown, Aalsma & Ott, 2013).

Similarly, students who recounted bullying incidents to school personnel also reported that recognition and follow-up was rare (Brown, Aalsma & Ott, 2013; Varjas, Meyers, Bellmoff, Lopp, Birckbichler & Marshall, 2008). Kochenderfer-Ladd and Pelletier (2008) found that teachers' beliefs were the most important predictors of whether they would intervene in a bullying situation. However, this study also discovered that teachers tend to overestimate their abilities to detect

bullying and bullies, as well as their effectiveness when they do intervene. Teachers reported intervening only when they felt sympathy for the victim and when they felt were personally effective in dealing with the bullying (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008). Teachers also found it difficult to determine whether bullying had occurred when they had not seen the incident (Mishna, Pepler & Wiener, 2006). Teachers who held beliefs that certain bullying behaviours were normal were less likely to intervene in situations, and they tended to perceive that bullying was more normative for boys than for girls (Harcourt, Hasperse, & Green, 2014; Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008).

Monda-Amaya and Rose (2012) discovered that there are questions regarding how well teachers understand bullying relationships. For example, in another study, third- to fifth-grade students with autism spectrum disorders, their parents, and their teachers reported similar levels of victimization, but the teachers reported significantly more bullying behaviours for these students than the children and parents did (Chen & Schwartz, 2012). This suggests that at the school level, there is limited recognition that social deficits may lead to behaviours that appear to be bullying but that are in fact retaliations based on the student's limited social skills.

In contrast to parent perceptions that schools need to be more responsive towards bullying, school personnel believed that families needed to be more active in responding to bullying when their children were involved: certain researchers believe these opposing views need to be addressed through encouraging closer parent-teacher partnerships (Harcourt, Hasperse & Green, 2014). According to a study of 888 students from grades five to nine in Australia, with regards to bullying and victimization, "families and teachers also need to be represented both as part of the problem and part of the solution" (Murray-Harvey & Slee, 2015, p.287). Their results indicated that the strongest and most direct relationship that reduced reported bullying was that of supportive

teachers; with ‘supportive’ being defined as teachers who encourage, listen to, understand, and respect students. The researchers recommended that systemic changes that involve whole communities are more likely to be successful than individual responses to specific situations (Murray-Harvey & Slee, 2015).

Although parents and teachers have a better overall understanding of bullying than children, they are not aware of the amount that is actually taking place (Mishna, Pepler & Wiener, 2006; Stevens, De Bourdeaudhuij & Van Oost, 2002; Stockdale, Hangaduambo, Duys, Larson, & Sarvela, 2002; Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). In addition, “[A] particularly common, concerning constant across the reviewed studies was the frequent miscommunication, misunderstanding, and misjudgment of bullying situations between parents and schools, leading to tension and unresolved problems between the school and the home” (Harcourt, Hasperse & Green, 2014, para. 52).

According to Mishna and colleagues (2006), the reasons that children do not share their bullying experiences include feeling that it makes the bullying worse, fear of repercussions from the bully, fear that their peers will dislike them for telling, a culture of secrecy around bullying that is hard to overcome, and the victims blaming themselves for the incidents.

There are other issues regarding adults’ perceptions on bullying, including assumptions that bullied children lack confidence and are unassertive, or that children whom adults consider to be instigators, or too sensitive, do not deserve empathy. Parents and teachers find it difficult to deal with bullying that occurs among friends, and they tend to underestimate the damage resulting from different forms of bullying, which leads to inappropriate and ineffective responses (Mishna, Pepler & Wiener, 2006). Therefore, research that focuses on understanding children’s experiences

in social contexts at school, and how positive adjustment may be possible in some difficult situations, is pertinent to address some of these tacit assumptions.

Resilience and children 'at risk.' Investigations into the nature of resilience have shown that it arises from basic developmental systems, such as the attachment system, and is not dependent on extraordinary abilities or internal resources (Masten, 2010). This is a recent development, as the concept of resilience was viewed as an internal and possibly innate characteristic like an antibody (Luthar & Cicchetti 2000). Whereas Cameron et al. (2011) have defined resilience as adaptive processes that respond to environmental challenges within specific contexts and cultures, the emerging constructivist view is that resilience is a reciprocal negotiation between individual experiences and social constructions that incorporate a diversity of behaviours and meanings (Lee Kwong Cheung, Ungar, Cheung, 2009). Even more recently, the definition of resilience has been expanded and clarified, to be the capacity of a dynamic system to prosper when disturbances threaten the system's stability, viability, or development: this can be applied to many kinds of systems at many levels (Masten, 2014). In practice, within the context of exposure to serious threat or risk, resilience is the extent to which individuals and groups navigate toward resources that sustain a satisfactory state of existence in ways that are meaningful physically, socially, culturally, and psychologically (Ungar, 2011).

A mutual and lasting affiliative relationship with at least one adult has been found to be one of the most common protective factors in resilient children (Kim-Cohen, 2007). All forms of resilience research have found that promoting positive relationships or interactions with children at risk who are vulnerable to negative outcomes can improve and even prevent problems. Social support, including ties to family, and relationships with teachers and classmates, have been shown

repeatedly to protect children from negative outcomes (Harcourt, Hasperse, & Green, 2014; Hunter, 2012; Ozbay et al., 2008; Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000).

Positive school-based relationships are implicated in many resilience studies; access to caring adults and friends allows for attachment security to develop and promotes learning according to Ann Masten (2010), and she cites activities that prevent and reduce bullying activities throughout the school milieu (buses, playgrounds, and classrooms) as examples of resilience processes in development. Rather than focusing on what makes a resilient person, it can be more helpful to focus on the specific processes that tend to cultivate resilience in some people (Harney, 2007). Knowing how and where the protection process is involved is imperative in designing effective interventions (Hunter, 2012).

A longitudinal study on the relationship between beliefs about resilience and positive child development was completed in 2006 with a sample of 843 grade 4 students, from six elementary schools in Hong Kong, and their parents. Parents answered an inventory about adversity regarding their children, and a parenting assessment of their children's performances at home and at school. The children completed measures of resilience and a scale of beliefs about adversity. Regression analyses highlighted that children's resilience beliefs were predictive of their positive development; therefore, promoting resilience in children's environments can help to protect them against the negative effects of adverse circumstances (Lee et al, 2009).

According to recent research, teachers tend to underestimate the importance of their roles as supports for children's resilience, and showed difficulty identifying which students were resilient. Teachers felt that resilience was an unchanging characteristic that correlated more with academic performance than with changeable relationships with peers, school personnel, and school

climate (Green, Oswald, & Spears, 2007; Holt, Kaufman Kantor & Finkelhor, 2009; Russo& Boman, 2007).

Resilience researchers have worked on the Negotiating Resilience Project for several years, using qualitative methods such as Photo-Interviews to examine resilience. This technique uses collaborative conversations to solicit participants' interpretations of their own photographs, and then looks at how these interpretations add to their perceptions of resilience (Ungar, Theron & Didkowsky, 2011; Ungar et al, 2008; Cameron et al, 2013; Theron, Cameron, Didkowsky, Lau, Liebenberg & Ungar, 2011).

In an international study, photographs taken by 16 teenagers were analyzed and participants were asked to reflect on these visuals. Qualitative visual methods were able to reveal aspects of resilience (protective factors) for adolescents despite the social and economic adversity they experienced (Didkowsky, Ungar & Liebenberg, 2010). The authors found that using visual data such as video recordings and photographs produced by participants helped both the researchers and the teens to understand the process of resilience, through reflective interviews with the young people about their visual data. They concluded that visual methods have the potential to reduce imbalances of power, significantly help youth to participate in the research process, and overcome language barriers (Didkowsky, Ungar & Liebenberg, 2010). The adolescents' perceptions of resilience were examined according to grounded theory (Liebenberg & Ungar, 2009), which resulted in seven basic themes pertinent for children from different cultures in eleven countries, including Canada. Ungar and his colleagues (e.g., Ungar et al., 2008; Ungar, Theron and Didkowsky, 2011; Ungar, 2011) explain that resilience research has focused on exploring how children use strategies that help improve their access to resources found within individual, family

and community systems. These aspects of resilience include the ability to deal with stress when under threat, and recovery after having been exposed to risks, such as bullying.

Ungar (2011) advocates an understanding of resilience as "facilitated growth amid contextual variability where adversity has been experienced" (p.2). It is one of his foundational tenets that "children change not because of what they do, but as a consequence of what their environment provides" (p.5). He proposes the use of qualitative research, such as visual methods and interviews, to identify aspects of resilience that are expressed by an individual within certain contexts (Ungar, 2011).

Child interviews and visual storytelling. The descriptive nature of qualitative inquiry allows for deeper access to individual experiences, particularly of historically marginalized populations such as children (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach & Richardson, 2005). Much research on child and youth resilience has used quantitative methods for the identification of risk and protective factors, but a drawback of these studies is based on assumptions of the dominant culture regarding the relevancy of certain concepts and processes (Didkowsky, Ungar & Liebenberg, 2010). Some of these concerns have been addressed using qualitative methods such as interviews, but these too fall short of accessing the experiences of individuals who may be marginalized; for example, children, especially those with learning difficulties, who require a certain level of verbal understanding and vocabulary to express themselves appropriately (ibid, 2010). The on-going research of the Negotiating Resilience Project (NRP) uses visual methods to explore the positive development of marginalized youth in stressful situations in Canada and internationally. One of the visual techniques they term "auto-driven photo-elicitation" allows for "reciprocity and reflexivity between researchers and participants in the design [and] for shared contemplation of data and collaborative meaning generation" (p.12), which in turn responds to

concerns regarding researcher/participant power imbalances, participant distance from the research topic, and limitations due to language issues (ibid, 2010).

Visual storytelling through photo-interviews was used to document and share the perspectives of students with learning difficulties. This method has evolved from Photovoice, a qualitative method that, according to Wang (1999) is based on participants taking self-defined photos that contain significant messages with the potential to create change through discussion with those who can affect public policy. The voices of children with learning difficulties and their parents are often not heard, because the needs of the school and broader policy often take precedence in discussions regarding interventions due to "power differentials" (Castleden, Garvin, Hyy-ay-aht First Nation, 2008; Worcester, Nesman, Raffaele Mendez, & Keller, 2008). Worcester and his colleagues (2008) point out that conventional research often does not access the voices of marginalized groups whereas phenomenological approaches (such as photo interviews) provide access to the lived experiences of those most affected by policy and interventions. For Castleden and Garvin, their modified Photovoice study was done with First Nations peoples as partners in all aspects, to provide ownership and develop research that was as relevant as possible to those participating in it (Castleden, et al., 2008).

According to one of the lead researchers using visual methods, Linda Leibenberg, photo-elicitation allows participants to remain in control of the research content, which is especially empowering for those students who have difficulties with expression due to writing or verbal difficulties. The use of visual methods is therefore a more ethical choice for vulnerable persons. In this research format, the visual images do not serve as data, but are instead supportive and motivating for the personal narratives; the participants provide the meaning within the context of their experiences (Liebenberg, 2009). The ability to access children's perceptions of resilience

through a methodology like photo-interviews, permits the expression of both protective factors (for example, statements of belonging or cohesion through shared activities) and risk (for example, comfort with the researchers to act spontaneously).

Present Study

The anti-bullying programs being implemented have not been systemically evaluated within the schools, the notions of resiliency and bullying are covered only minimally in the literature, and the richness provided by qualitative methods that privilege the voices of children and other key players (such as parents) are appropriate to understanding this complex and context specific phenomenon.

Research objectives. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions regarding the strengths and use of resources, or resilience, of identified elementary school children who have been involved in bullying and who have EHDAA classified as learning difficulties (see Introduction). The perceptions of key stakeholders included those of the children, their parents, and those in the "social ecology" (Ungar, 2011), consisting of teachers, school staff intervening with the children, and administrators. These perceptions have been analysed to understand the circumstances that enhance resilience for at-risk children. This model is based on an ecological-developmental design, where individual characteristics and school culture are considered as they interact to promote school-wide changes in behavioural functioning (Carlson, Engebretson, & Chamberlain, 2006).

To provide appropriate support to these children, it is important to know the commonalities among the individual perspectives of children with learning difficulties, their parents, teachers and school administrators as they pertain to perceptions of resilience and involvement in bullying. The

meaning created by directed reflections within this context can help to direct the anti-bullying programs that have been mandated by government policy. For each of these individuals there are elements that are unique to their experience within a specific context (Ponteretto, 2005). Within the dialogue that is generated, each point of view provides meaning that combines with others to construct a new 'knowing' in the ontological sense.

The main objectives of the project were:

1) To give children with learning difficulties an opportunity for self-expression to describe their perceptions of their resilience within the context of bullying;

2) To clarify common resilience themes that affect the experience of bullying within the school situation of students with learning difficulties;

3) To discuss with teachers and parents their perceptions of children's resilience in terms of anti-bullying interventions.

The research questions included:

1) How do students perceive their strengths and resources?

2) How do the parents and school staff perceive the students' resilience?

3) How are anti-bullying programs promoting perceptions of resilience in children? This photo-interview project provided children with opportunities to engage in self-reflection about their abilities to access resources, use their personal strengths, and effect change. It is anticipated that teachers will benefit from increased understanding of the resilience of these students' and their families' perceptions as they plan their anti-bullying interventions. It is also felt that by highlighting the positives that are present in children's lives, all participants can be encouraged to

remember that no matter what the circumstances, there are elements in the child's context that help him or her cope. The positive focus of the study was designed to empower the multiple voices of stakeholders participating in this project to share their perceptions and experiences with anti-bullying programs. In addition, a focus on the resilience of children with learning difficulties who are involved in bullying complements current bullying research literature by highlighting students' strengths and use of resources.

Methods

Research Design

This qualitative study used visual methods that allow for culturally and contextually driven data gathering (Liebenberg, 2009). Although the original design of the study sought to use an adapted form of Participatory Action Research (PAR), as recommended by the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP, 2005), this was not practical as the project proceeded. A distinctive objective of PAR is to ask the participants to be active partners in the research process, leading to a greater likelihood that the results help identify ways to promote changes that are more consistent with results and therefore more effective (Munford & Sanders, 2009). For this project, the research team designed and led the data gathering, data analysis, and dissemination of results due to constraints in respondents' participation; that is, parental, school personnel, and individual children's availabilities. The goal remained that of knowledge production for the sake of informing policy and practice in areas of social change, but the partners were not able to engage in data analysis or dissemination of findings.

Involving respondents with learning difficulties poses challenges in research studies, because their verbal skills and confidence may be limited. Popular social research methods often

discriminate against vulnerable respondents, such as those with learning difficulties, because they are based on language and may exclude these children from participation in ways that echo their wider social exclusion. Several studies on vulnerable groups, including children, have used the photo-interview method of participatory research. When children are encouraged to participate in research through more direct means, such as through photo-interviews, there is evidence that these approaches can produce a deeper understanding of characteristics previously hidden in their lives and experiences (Aldridge, 2012).

As previously discussed, the Negotiating Resilience Project (NRP) used grounded theory analysis for their interview data, which resulted in seven themes (or "tensions") that were found to be relevant to children across cultures (Liebenberg and Unger, 2009; Ungar et al, 2007; see Appendix A). These themes formed the basis for this project. Children were invited to take pictures at the schools they attend with the themes as general guides: (1) access to material resources, with a focus on Educational Resources ("I learn ..."); (2) significant Relationships ("I can count on …"); (3) Identity, with a focus on self-appraisal of strengths ("I'm good at ..."); (4) Power and Control, or the ability to affect change ("I can change ..."); (5) Cultural Adherence ("I am proud that ..."); (6) social justice, with a focus on Social Equality ("Fairness is ..."); and (7) Cohesion, with a focus on feeling a part of something ("I belong ...").

Procedure

To provide contextual information regarding the social ecologies of the students, permission to use school documents, conduct interviews, and meet with school teams was obtained in discussion with the school board and administrators of the targeted schools, and then with the teachers and interventionists for nominated children, and finally with the parents and individual children. All these were obtained according to ethical guidelines related to research with

vulnerable children: at each location, the research was explained in detail, including the research goals, and the procedures for interviews and document reviews were presented to the stakeholders. It was made clear that any of the participants were able to withdraw from the study at any time. Over and above approval, the researcher was concerned about maintaining the confidentiality of the participants through balancing the need for contextual information that provided a good understanding of the individuals while at the same time guarding against identifying information. Ethics approval was obtained from Concordia University by Dr. Petrakos, from M. Laverdière, le président du comité d'éthique de la recherche, Lettres et sciences humaines de l'Université de Sherbrooke, and from the Director of Educational Services at the designated school board.

The interviews took place in the following sequence: focus group meetings with teachers and resource team personnel for each school; individual meetings with designated parents; interviews with the children during the meetings of the photography club; follow-up focus group discussions with school staff; and individual interviews with parents. Each of the focus group meetings and individual interviews with parents lasted approximately one hour. The encounters with children are described in more detail in another part of the methods section.

An overview of the study was presented during resource team meetings at each school in order to discuss any issues regarding organization, feasibility, themes, and to generate a list of students who would benefit from participation (see Appendix B). At that time, principals and school resource team members provided individual consent to participate in the research (see Appendix C). The team members consisted of those who work regularly with the designated students: those in specialized classes had a teacher and a technician, while students in regular classes had teachers for English, French, and a technician. Both types of students had access to a remediation team. Many students shared the same school staff members.

The researcher usually knew the children who were being nominated personally, went through the list that the staff generated, and reviewed the students' files to make sure they met criteria for inclusion in the study. The parents were contacted by the researcher for permission to include their children in the project, and for their own participation in an interview at its conclusion (see Appendix D). Only one contacted parent refused permission, and that was because her child would not be available to participate. Due to the extensive time commitment for participating, the families were allowed reflection time if they desired; however, all parents informed the researcher at the initial meeting that they were interested in participating and having their children participate as well.

The interviews with school staff and parents followed a semi-structured format of open questions. For example, a question for teachers was, "What is the best thing about working with these students?" (Appendix F); while for parents, a question was, "What is the best thing about living with your son/daughter?" (Appendix G). The interviews were designed to allow freedom of expression without constraints for participants, and for this reason, parents were interviewed separately from the school staff.

Focus groups. Two focus groups were held with the teachers and staff of each school; one before the photography project and the other once the project was completed. The researcher guided these groups using open-ended questions to capture the participants' perceptions of these students as learners, and discuss conceptions of resilience, school-based interventions objectives, and the impact of services on students, parents, and teachers (see Appendix F). The focus groups lasted approximately one hour and were scheduled at the convenience of participating teachers. These discussions with the school team were necessary, as collaboration with the community was an important aspect of this research project.

The use of focus groups to provide insights on perceptions of resiliency for these children reflects the constructivist framework of the study. Because the objective of the study is to gain insight into the experiences of a specific group concerning the characteristics of a particular phenomenon, feedback from members is crucial in maintaining internal and external validity (Ghesquiere, et al., 2004).

Parent Meetings. Participants were recruited from grades 5 and 6 from both a rural and a suburban elementary school. The parents of students who had previously been identified as having learning difficulties (with formal assessments of abilities and IEP in place) and who had notifications within their school confidential files regarding involvement with bullying, were contacted by letter explaining the study and its goals and invited to a meeting with the researcher to discuss the project (see Appendix D). At that time, questions and concerns were addressed, and the consents to participate for themselves and their children were signed (see Appendix E). The first meeting with parents was not to collect data but was used to present an overview of the research procedure, to explain the rationale for the study, and to answer any questions they may have had about their own participation or that of their children. All participants were informed that they were participating in a study and were given general information regarding its purpose. Reassuring parents that the study was an independent project that could provide their children and themselves with the opportunities to express their feelings without prejudice about their perceptions of resilience was a key component of the initial meeting. The assignment of aliases was used to protect the anonymity of the informants.

Interview process. After parental consent and child assent were obtained, the children were interviewed using visual storytelling through photo-interviews, which has been found to be useful to document and share the perspectives of students with learning difficulties (Monette &

Petrakos, conference presentation). The method was adapted for this study because not all partners were engaged in data analysis and dissemination due to time constraints. As such, it cannot be considered as true Participatory Action Research (PAR) (Liebenberg, 2009).

To address ethical issues, participants asked permission before taking pictures of other people. Because photos of public places such as schools can be identified, the context of their use was discussed with the research team (Wiles, Prosser, Bagnoli, Clark, Davies, Holland and Renold, 2008).

Interviews were recorded using audio equipment and ethnographic notes by each member of the research team. The interviews were transcribed and then coded for major themes. Although this was the format used for all the interviews and focus groups, it allowed particularly for rapport to be developed between the child and the interviewer, and for less pressure to provide socially approved responses to questions. [1] A lot of effort went into making a safe space for the children. Everything they did was acceptable, such as being silly, talking about something else entirely, or choosing not to respond at all. The method was adapted as needed, and the use of activities assured that the children could respond to interview questions through informal conversations that took place while the children were walking around, taking photos, and doing scrapbooking. The interview process was therefore more informal dialogue than formalized sit-down sessions.

The Photography Club. Students met for sessions of the photography club once a week for ten weeks. The first meeting was a group session to explain the use of cameras and discuss the

[1] Note: In the spring of 2014, the researcher participated in a three-day training session with Dr. Michael Ungar and Dr. Linda Liebenberg on researching resilience using visual methods.

ethics (rules) of taking photos at school. After this session, each meeting featured 15-minute gatherings in groups and 30 minutes for individual sessions with the researchers. During the group meetings, students were introduced to the theme of the week (see Appendix A) and given time to start thinking and taking pictures; the second part consisted of an individual session between each student and a researcher for a personal interview on the photos they took. Each week, students chose five photos they wanted to print to include in their albums, and the researcher interviewed them using a semi-structured interview of open-ended questions such as "Why is this picture important to you? (See Appendix H). Students could choose a photo they wanted to take home every week. The last two weeks of the Photography Club focused on the students' choices of the visual representations they wanted to share with the school staff, parents and invited peers. The children selected twenty images from those they took, and with the support of the researchers, they prepared personalized albums of their photos. Each student presented his or her album to his or her selected audience at separate vernissages (or showcases), which were coordinated with teachers and parents for their convenience. The photography exhibition was held in three parts, one with peers during the day (arranged with classroom teachers), one with teachers at lunchtime, and one with families after school hours.

Analysis of Data

Qualitative content analysis. According to Vaismoradi, Turruen and Bondas (2013), qualitative methodologies try to comprehend a particular situation "from the perspective of those experiencing it" (p.398). The search for commonalities across interviews allows for qualitative interpretation, because the data represents the actual behaviours, motivations, and attitudes of the participants. Vaismoradi and colleagues (2013) state that the researcher uses a context to construct a world in which the interview texts make sense and answer the research questions.

Content analysis enables researchers to sift through large volumes of data with relative ease in a systematic fashion. It is useful for examining trends and patterns in documents (Stemler, 2001). This research began with pre-existing themes derived from international resilience research with youth; therefore, content analysis of the contextual meanings was determined to be the most appropriate analysis method to classify the many transcribed interview texts from the study.

After determining that Ungar's Seven Tensions (2007, see Appendix A) were appropriate starting points for closer examination of perceptions of resilience for children, their parents, and school personnel, operational definitions were established for each theme. After discussion among members of the research team, the following additional guidelines were used to help clarify certain themes for coding: (1) Educational Resources: "I learn…" included any references to the Character Education Pillars that form the foundation of the ABAV Plans for the schools. These are Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Kindness, Caring, and Citizenship; (3) Identity or self-appraisal of strengths was expanded to include "I am good at…" "I know how…" "I can do…"; (6) Social Equality was also expanded to include "Fairness is…" "People should…" and any reference to bullying; (7) Cohesion, or feeling part of something, added the reference phrase "We…" to "I belong to…" Most of the data fit quite easily into the thematic categories, and two across-themes sub-categories of Gender Issues and Negative Viewpoint also emerged from the data (see Research Design for the original seven themes definitions).

Coding for the focus groups and parent interviews was done using content analysis, but the attention was on specific questions that were pertinent to these participants' experiences with the children and not the resilience themes.

Qualitative content analysis has been defined as the systemic and objective use of replicable and valid methods to make specific inferences from text to other characteristics of the original sources of data, using description and quantification of themes or patterns (Elo, Kaariainen, Kanste, Polkki, Utriainen & Kyngas, 2014; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Mayring, 2000). According to Hsieh & Shannon (2005), directed content analysis should be used when "existing theory or prior research about a phenomenon…would benefit from further description" (p.1281). With a directed approach, analysis starts with a theory or relevant research findings as a guide for the initial codes, in order to strengthen or extend its applications (Elo et al, 2014; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Comprehensive directed content analysis uses both deductive and inductive methods as well as conscientious recording of the data analysis process in place of a post hoc defense of the trustworthiness of findings (Humble, 2009). In qualitative analysis, validity is established through the trustworthiness of a study; therefore, trustworthiness criteria assist the researcher to accurately report the process of content analysis (Elo et al, 2014).

Establishing validity through trustworthiness. In an in-depth discussion of content analysis by Elo and colleagues (2014), they found that trustworthiness includes the following concepts: Credibility, Dependability, Confirmability, Transferability, and Authenticity.

To establish *credibility*, purposive sampling was used in this study. Credibility was also reflected when the research team members, who have knowledge and understanding of the research goals, interpreted the data through returning several times to check whether identified ideas are corroborated by other interviews. Following credibility guidelines, the results from the photo-elicitation methodology were compared using triangulation for consistency of themes in combination with parent interviews, and focus group transcripts, as suggested by Humble, (2009) and Stemler (2001).

According to Elo and associates (2014), the *dependability* of a study is strong if another researcher can readily follow the decision trail used by the initial researcher. In this study, detailed descriptions have been used to display the themes in the data and the analysis process of categorization.

Confirmability refers to objectivity; in this analysis, each main concept has been linked to the data by a transcribed quotation that has been determined to be representative of the sample, so it is clear that the interpretations have not been invented by the main inquirer (Elo et al, 2014).

The theme descriptions and the participants' main characteristics have been reported in detail so that the *transferability* of the results to other contexts can be assessed for the extent to which the findings can be transferred to other settings or groups (Elo et al, 2014).

Authenticity or integrity has been demonstrated by ongoing researcher reflection, to ensure that the interpretations are valid and grounded in the data; the findings are therefore believed to reflect the participants' voices, conditions of the inquiry, and range of realities, and not the researcher's biases, motivations, or perspectives (Elo et al, 2014).

Reliability was safeguarded through using the research team members to provide inter-coder reliability as suggested by Elo and his colleagues (2014). The inclusion of the researcher's and research assistants' field notes for coding was also used to increase reliability (Stemler, 2001; Vaismoradi et al, 2013).

The qualitative data from the interviews and documents was subjected to thematic analysis using a deductive approach that identifies understandings and perceptions of resilience. In this study, iterative analysis using systematic comparisons of previously coded concepts and rank order

comparisons involving quantification were used to provide richer descriptions, as suggested by Ghesquiere, Maes and Vandenberghe (2004), and Humble (2009). (See Appendix I for an example of coded text.)

Role of researcher and research team. Rather than the classical experimental design, in which the researcher observes from a distance the interaction of subjects in highly controlled settings (positivism), in constructivist design the researcher becomes part of the research, and natural interactions occurring in the usual context of the targeted individuals are at the centre of the methodology (Mills, Bonner & Francis, 2006). The researcher was the assigned school psychologist working one full day per week in each of the elementary schools chosen for the study who had already established relationships in the schools with students, teachers and staff.

As a practicing school psychologist, the researcher was aware that the focus for intervention in education culture is most often based on the prevention of negative behaviours rather than on the nurture of positives. By accessing these students' perceptions on educational resources, significant relationships, self-appraisal of strengths, ability to affect change, cultural adherence, social equality, and feeling part of something, this study can inform practitioners and service providers to consider how resilience may play a role in their delivery of anti-bullying programs.

The research team consisted of the main researcher, the research supervisor, and a graduate student who acted as research coordinator; these members provided multiple perspectives and helped to assure external validity. The researcher presented the study to the school principals and then to the school teams, led the focus groups that occurred before and after the Photography Club, met with the parents to introduce the project and gain informed consent before the project started,

and then interviewed the parents at the project's completion. The research coordinator was experienced in this type of research in elementary schools, as the format was part of her thesis data collection in 2012. The research coordinator organized the research assistants in each school and trained them how to interview the children according to the open-ended questions format (Appendix H). She also led the teams through the weekly Photography Club interviews.

To ensure that all the students had enough time and attention for the photography sessions and interviews, two research assistants, a graduate and an undergraduate student, were present in each of the schools to conduct the interviews. Both the research coordinator and the research assistants worked as volunteers at the schools before the data collection process began in order to make themselves familiar to the students, so that the participants were comfortable with the researchers when the project began. Through the partnership between the research team and the participants, the project was able to provide a deep and sensitive representation of the children's school lives (Ghesquiere, et al, 2004).

Contextual information. The participating school board was a small English-language board located within a larger French-speaking population. It is a public school board with approximately 5000 students. Within and between the schools, there is diversity in the populations, with a broad range of ethnicities (including a high percentage of aboriginal students) and socio-economic status (SES); half of the schools have been designated as disadvantaged by the government of Quebec. Approximately one in five students has identified special needs that require support (NFSB Annual Report, 2011). Each school within the board has a committee formed for the creation and implementation of an Anti-Bullying Anti-Violence Plan (ABAV Plan) that incorporates the specific requirements of Law 19 (article 75.1).

Two schools were chosen to participate in this study. One was a suburban elementary school that draws its population from the town in which it is located as well as nearby communities. Students with special needs were fully integrated into regular classrooms. The other was a rural elementary school that draws from several communities, necessitating long bus rides in the mornings and evenings, and bus sharing with the regional high school. There was a special education class with full-time technician support. In the rural school, there are long histories in which teachers and parents have attended school together, or in some cases are related by blood ties or marriage. For a professional entering the school these dynamics can be quite potent, and whom you know and who is related to whom is important to both the staff and the parents of the students in the rural school; this is less so with the suburban school.

Contextual information to provide an ecological-systemic understanding of the schools attended by the participating children was derived from the mandated ABAV plan of each school and from the 2014 "Tell Them From Me" (TTFM) school survey. For a more detailed and specific understanding of the context of participants, the following information was reviewed: individual students' diagnoses; interventions and strategies stated in their IEP documents; and a review of notifications in students' confidential files regarding involvement with bullying incidents.

School ABAV plans. Each school has formed a committee to create and implement an ABAV plan that is approved and evaluated by the school's Governing Board, as stipulated in Law 19 (Section 75.1). In addition to steps to be taken in case of incidents and follow-up measures, there are preventive aspects such as a Character Education program (Character Pillars), and Codes of Conduct. Additionally, parent participation is promoted through links on the schools' websites, information evenings, and meetings with individual parents. The confidentiality of any report is protected, and the plan is reviewed annually and signed by the entire staff. Reports are kept in

confidential files locked away or on a secure website, along with records of disciplinary measures used and monitoring for incidents according to their severity.

Tell Them From Me (TTFM) school survey. The use of bullying indicators from the TTFM survey are already being used within the school board and allow for comparisons between schools, between school years, and with broader Canadian norms (NFSB, working document). The anonymous elementary school student survey targets students from grades 4-8 and is designed so that students can complete it on-line with a minimum of assistance (http://www.thelearningbar.com/, retrieved 01/12/12). The information gathered from the TTFM survey has been used in this study to provide context and is not a variable in the data analysis.

For 2014, TTFM categories were selected as a way to gather more contextual information about each school. The following categories were chosen because they reflect the themes of resilience that were being used to frame the research project: (a) *Belonging:* "Students feel accepted and valued by their peers and by others at their school," (b) *Victims of bullying:* "Students are subjected to physical, social, or verbal bullying, or are bullied over the Internet," (c) *Feel Safe Attending this School:* "Students feel safe at school as well as going to and from school," (d) *Positive Behaviour:* **"**Students that do not get in trouble at school for disruptive or inappropriate behaviour" (http://www.thelearningbar.com/ retrieved 07/07/15).

In looking at the data for this school board, students in grades 4, 5 and 6 were within the Canadian norms for feelings of belonging and feeling safe attending school. It is interesting to note that in addition to a gender gap for positive behaviour according to Canadian norms, that gap is larger between boys and girls for students in this school board (95% for girls and 77% for boys).

There are notable gender differences in the experience of being a victim of bullying between the two schools, even though Canadian norms indicate the same rates for both boys and girls. At the rural school, almost one half (47%) of the girls considered themselves to be victims of bullying, compared to less than a third of the boys (29%). At the suburban school however, more boys considered themselves to be bullied than girls (one in 3 compared to one in 4), which may explain why more girls felt safe at this school (80%) when compared to the Canadian norms for girls (67%). The goal of this project was not to look at suburban versus rural experiences of bullying, but despite this, there appear to be differences in perceptions within these two groups that may affect how ABAV plans should be designed and implemented. The TTFM survey may be a powerful tool to help personalize these plans according to school contexts.

Learning difficulties and Individual Education Plans (IEPs). A detailed case history, according to Roseberry-McKibbin (2013), involves looking at family living patterns, academic problems, prior assessments and treatments, and developmental history. The confidential files of participating students were examined to obtain information about their learning difficulties (according to their psycho-educational assessments and IEP) and to look at recorded incidents of student involvement in bullying; these details were used as descriptors of the socio-ecological contexts of the students and were not considered for evaluation in the data analysis. The nominated children received a psychoeducational assessment that indicated the presence of a learning disability; as a result, they had a response plan (IEP) to address these difficulties.

Summary of learning difficulties in the schools. Most children who participated in the study were identified as having behaviour difficulties, such as Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Some students were diagnosed with Auditory Processing Disorder (APD), Anxiety Disorder, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Specific

Language Impairment, dyslexia and dysgraphia, and non-specific Learning Difficulties. All participating students had academic delays and social/emotional problems that were addressed in their Individualized Education Plans (IEP).

Summary of IEP interventions and strategies. All students had preferential seating and alternative locations for work/tests listed on their IEPs. Most students had extra time to complete work and/or extra time for exams and tests. Half the students had 'highlight key information/instructions' and 'provide listening checks (rephrasing)'. Four students had access to personal laptops. Other common academic strategies included simplified instructions, provision of visual cues to listening, use of visual schedules, breaking tasks into smaller steps, and allowance for the use of assistive technology. Common behaviour interventions included provision of consistent expectations and consequences, role-play target behaviours, and social skills training. Most of the IEPs primarily focused on academic strategies, but all of them included some behavioural interventions. The use of modeling for both academics and social skills was mentioned in several IEPs. Mentoring, meeting with a teacher, and check-ins with an adult were listed as strategies.

Summary of involvement in bullying. The number of notifications of involvement in bullying in the student participants' confidential files ranged from two to twenty-seven. One student was identified as being a victim only. Five of the ten students were identified as being bullies, and the remaining four were considered both bullies and victims. Detentions and suspensions were common, and community-based social services support had been requested for all those students who had been identified as bullies. Several students had attended or were recommended to attend hospital-based day treatment programs for behaviour disorders.

Findings

The findings are described in the following three sections: (a) contextual information, including the characteristics and challenges faced by each of the children according to their IEPs, confidential reports, teacher and parent perceptions; (b) summaries from the children's discussions which were prompted by Ungar's (2011) work with youth; and (c) results from the content analysis of the student interviews related to the presented themes, in order to address the question of children's perceptions of resilience.

Through these discussions, students' perceptions regarding the following areas were accessed: their awareness and use of educational resources, their perceptions of significant relationships, their self-appraisal of strengths, perceptions of their abilities to affect change, their cultural adherence, their views on social equality, and their sense of belonging.

Contextual Information and Perceptions of Children's Challenges and Resilience from Parents' and Teachers' Viewpoints

To provide a framework, the following section summarizes the characteristics of the children who participated in the project, based on information gathered from their confidential files and IEPs. This information is provided to give a brief overview on the students' learning and behaviour challenges without disclosing data that would reveal their identities. Each summary also includes information gathered from the school meetings before and after the project, and the parent interviews; thus, the descriptions vary depending on the aspects that were provided during these meetings.

There were five participating students in each school. Their specific challenges and differences, including their experiences with bullying, allowed for an appreciation of why they were nominated by their teachers for this project. Both their teachers and parents felt that they

would benefit in participating in a project where their strengths may emerge and be acknowledged. A description of each child's difficulties provides a context for understanding the realities the children faced. Teacher and parent reports also provided support for the data gathered from confidential files and IEP reports.

Rural school. *Child A.* Child A attended a specialized class for students with significant difficulties. There have been major upheavals in his family life, and he has lived off and on with various family members, including with his grandmother. He is the youngest of four brothers, all of whom required support services for behaviour problems throughout their schooling. He was identified as having behaviour difficulties in Kindergarten. Child mental health services have been involved for many years. Academically, Child A was felt to have the ability to do very well, but several attempts to integrate him back into a regular classroom failed due to his extremely violent behaviours.

During the initial focus group, the resource teacher, who has known him since he started Kindergarten, recounted,

> Just the other day he…slammed a child's head against the window. He said, 'I did this, I lost it and I almost killed him, and can you check up on him.' He regrets it with all his might, like he says 'I just want to crumble and die' – the fear is when he really loses it to that extent, where is it going to go? And so that's the scary part.

She said that they can see that he is scared by his own actions, and that it's almost like he "blacks out" during some violent episodes. The special education technician said that Child A has a hard time trusting people. His teacher said that Child A "has no friends. He's always on the

perimeter. It's because he can only interact in a negative way." She also said that he reads very well, with good comprehension, and that he is responsible if given a task to do.

In the parent interview, his mother said that one of Child A's strengths was his love of music. He also loves to play video games. When asked about his use of resources and his strengths, she said that he learns quickly, loves to learn, and is very creative. She said that he is very sensitive but can be too emotional. She worried about his "rages" but felt that he has been bullied as well.

When describing himself, Child A called himself a troublemaker, and told the researchers, "I don't have any friends right now." Despite his teachers' and his parent's view that he did not have any academic difficulties, he said to the researchers, "You're gonna have to help me write."

Child B. Child B attended a bilingual grade five class. She lived with her parents and a younger brother. She was referred to social work support services for behaviour issues. She openly discussed suicidal thoughts with school staff and had begun to use self-harming behaviours as a method of coping. Her academics were delayed by more than two years. Her situation was not discussed in the focus groups, except when her teacher suggested that she was a student who met the inclusion criteria.

In the parent interview, her mother said that although Child B loves school, she was more focused on the "social life." She said, "She doesn't think before she does things. She feels badly about herself." When discussing the goals of the project, her mother said, "I feel like her voice is not heard yet. She doesn't really have that confidence yet." Her mother said that at home it was, "Very hectic, especially when my son came along. Child B still finds it difficult adapting to it. She wishes she was an only child."

In terms of her learning, Parent B said,

> It's a struggle all the time. It gets worse of course with homework or something like that. She knows she's having difficulties, so now she sees herself as not normal. She doesn't like to write, she doesn't like math, she doesn't like reading, y'know?

Regarding her daughter's strengths, Parent B said, "She likes singing, and gym and all sorts of things like that. She draws very well. And she loves basketball. She loves ice skating [and] hockey, y'know? I know she has a lot to offer."

Parent B recounted occasions where her daughter had been bullied, and other times when she had been 'bugged' by other children. She was proud that her daughter said to her, "I can forgive, Mommy. They bullied me, but I forgave them."

Child B shared with the researchers that she "got bullied before." She told them, "Some people think I'm crazy but sometimes I am crazy and sometimes I'm not." She did not comment about any academic issues.

Child C. Child C was in a bilingual grade five class. He lived with his parents and an older sister. He had three older brothers, two of whom did not live at home. In the focus group meeting where students were nominated for the project, the principal mentioned that Child C was having a lot of difficulty with his peers, especially at lunch times. Academically, his teacher said that he was "very learning disabled" especially for reading and writing, but the main issues at school were still behavioural. He was described as having poor spatial awareness. The special education technician said that Child C's attention span was "like a flea" and that he "tends to be very literal". His English teacher said that,

> Child C has a different perception of events, and the cumulative effects of life events over the years haven't helped. He doesn't 'get' what bullying is. He thinks he's being bullied.

He tried to trip another kid while saying 'Watch this!' to other students. But when he's called on it, he thinks he's being unfairly punished.

The resource teacher said that Child C was very knowledgeable and creative, and liked to be a leader in discussions; during resource sessions, he helped, "everyone else to find their things, but not his own." The music teacher said that Child C was very creative, enthusiastic, and an excellent actor. He felt that Child C was willing to try anything "with an artistic edge" and that he "thinks outside the box."

At the initial meeting to explain the project and get consent to participate, Parent C said that she was so concerned about his behaviour difficulties that she had requested a full-time attendant for him. Despite numerous attempts to arrange an interview with his mother at the end of the project, she never responded.

Child C showed strong evidence of learning difficulties in the photography interviews. For example, he asked the researcher, "How do you write one again? Is it O-N-E? I know his name, but I can't remember how to write it, so I write someone." He also showed evidence of the behaviour difficulties mentioned by his parent and the school staff, when he recounted, "I grabbed him before he punched someone, so I don't see why I should get in trouble. I'm going to talk to the principal because this is my time I'm wasting."

Child D. Child D had attended a specialized class for students with significant difficulties but had reintegrated into the regular class once the study started. She had to take a taxi to and from school due to problems on the bus. Child mental health services were involved, and she was referred to a hospital day-treatment program for children with severe behaviour issues. She was not discussed in the focus group meetings, except when she was nominated by her classroom

teacher. Her mother died several years previously. She lived with her father, stepmother, and older sister.

Her stepmother came to the parent interview and said that being in the Photography Club had been a positive experience, “She didn’t bicker as much with her sister. She didn’t argue with me as much.” She said that at home,

> Sometimes Child D can be pigheaded. I don’t hear from her, she plays her games, or she’ll go out for a walk. She does share a room with her sister, unfortunately. We even put up an imitation fake wall and had to separate them and it still doesn’t help. Her older sister likes to pick on her a lot, try to boss her around, and that’s where Child D starts getting really cross and really mean.

Her stepmother described Child D as an “excellent” learner. She continued, “I can teach her anything and she’ll pick it up like that. She gets frustrated. She’ll walk away for half an hour and then she’ll come back and say, ‘Can I try that again?’” However, she was concerned about the transition to high school. She said, “Here she knows a lot of the teachers and the principal. She got a bond with her and now she has to leave.”

Her stepmother said that she enjoys Child D’s personality, “You could be mad at something and she’ll come up with something to make you happy or laugh.” The Photography Club was a positive experience for Child D according to her stepmother because, “She’s still showing people her photo album.”

Regarding bullying, her stepmother said,

> When Child D was getting bullied in school I came to the school. [I told them] you guys gotta do something about this. I'm getting tired of her coming home and crying to me all the time. Ended up that's when they came up with this bullying class (the Photography Club). She tries to think before she talks now. I'm actually proud that she's changed.

Child D complained about difficulties with her learning ("I suck at writing,") and behaviour ("If I got suspended one more time I'd probably be expelled,") during the photography sessions.

Child E. Child E was from a bilingual grade six class. He had repeated a grade. Behaviour problems were flagged early in his schooling for frequent and severe aggression. He received community-based social services support. In the initial focus group meeting, when the resource teacher nominated him for the project, she said that he did not appear to understand why his actions were wrong; she had heard him say that he "had to hurt someone". He was not discussed in the follow-up meeting.

Parent E said that her son wanted to be a "YouTuber" playing video games as a career. She was concerned that Child E did not make consistent effort and every school year was like climbing a mountain. She said that when his back was against the wall he would study hard, but that he preferred to do hands-on projects. She said that at home he was cheerful and affectionate. His mother said that she was trying to get him to be more independent, so she was only intervening when she heard from his teachers. She felt she was being somewhat successful because sometimes he would go to see his teachers at lunch for help.

Parent E was worried that Child E was still being bullied at school. She said that even though he tried to follow school procedures when he was being victimized, he preferred to defend

himself, and would ‘give back what he got’. She said that she hoped that he would be able to better manage his emotions and learn to let things go.

In the interviews, Child E spoke about fighting with another boy in the Photography Club while they were in different “gangs”. He said that, “Girls whine too much. Every time we wanna do something they’re like, no we’re gonna get in trouble. Yeah, we don’t care, even at school when we’re in trouble.” He was aware that he had learning difficulties and told the researchers that he was supposed to be in high school, but he had repeated Kindergarten.

Suburban school. *Child F.* Child F was from a bilingual grade six class. His parents were divorced but Child F saw his father regularly. He was the youngest of three boys. Although he had repeated a grade, he was still academically delayed by more than three years. He had also been identified with severe behaviour issues. He was receiving support from the community-based Child mental health team. He attended an alternative school for children with severe behaviour difficulties for some months in the year before the research project.

In the initial focus group meeting, the principal mentioned Child F as a good candidate for the project, because he was being physically and verbally aggressive towards others. His English teacher described him as being helpful to adults and enjoying working with his hands. He was not discussed in the follow-up focus group meeting.

Parent F replied to attempts to contact her with an email stating that she was too busy for an interview. She wrote, “The project was a success regarding art, expression, and team work,” and that her son “was doing great, he enjoyed participating in the project.”

His learning difficulties were apparent when Child F told the researcher, “Cool is a bad word. Cause there’s like twenty letters, no there’s five letters and they all mean bing. C-O-O-L.

There's four." He was aware that he had behaviour problems, saying, "I'm evil because it's funny." When he got suspended for pulling the fire alarm he said that he "felt good," because he got to stay home and did not have any homework.

Child G. Child G was in a bilingual grade five class. She had repeated a grade and received a lot of resource support: in-class, small group, and one-on-one. She had an older sister who lived with her and her mother, and three stepbrothers who lived with their father. There were accounts of abuse in her past. Child G was a psychiatric inpatient several years previously. She attended a day treatment program for children with severe behaviour disorders at another hospital in the year before her participation in the project. During the interviews with the researchers, she spoke openly about suicidal ideation.

In the focus group meetings, Child G was the first student nominated by the teachers as someone who would benefit from participation in the project. The special project resource teacher said that Child G had difficulty expressing her emotions.

In the parent interview, her mother said, "Child G is a people pleaser. She likes to ensure everyone else is happy and safe, never hesitating to protect someone she feels is being picked on. She loves being surrounded by friends and enjoys playing on-line videogames." Her mother said that at home, "Not knowing what she's going to say or do next keeps me on my toes. Child G can be very emotional, showing sympathy towards others, including strangers. And she takes these feelings to heart for quite some time."

Child G's mother said that, with respect to her strengths, "I feel her strength is that of her heart. She's learning to self-love which was the hardest lesson of all." Regarding Child G's learning, her mother said,

> She struggles yet can be so proud when she's overcome a limitation. Having been diagnosed with dyslexia provided her with a crutch she can lean on whenever something proved tough. Lately, she's wanting to [be] rid of that label and try harder.

Child G did not talk about her learning difficulties in the sessions, but talked in detail about being bullied, "My friends hate me. I'm getting bullied, name called all the time."

Child H. Child H attended a bilingual grade five class. He lived with his mother and his sister. He did not see his father regularly. He had an older brother and another younger sister who lived with his father. He was known at school for sometimes being cruel to animals. There had been problems with the law in his extended family. Resource support was given for several years and included small group work and one-on-one support.

In the focus group meeting where he was nominated for the project, the special project resource teacher said that he came from a good home, and that his mother was very supportive of his difficulties. His English teacher said that Child H enjoyed sports and working with his hands. He was not discussed in the follow-up focus group meeting.

In the parent interview, Child H's mother said that he "took it really hard" when his father left the family when Child H was seven years old. She said,

> I knew early on that Child H had both behavioural and learning issues. It has been frustrating at times as homework can be a real task and hassle. Child H truly benefits from hands-on and one-on-one time. My goal is to get him to become more independent.

Regarding the anti-bullying program at the school, she said,

> He did suffer from being bullied, as he does not make 'real' friends easily. He also tends to bully back. I believe that kids that bully are often victims of bullies as well. Whether it be at home or in school, they often lash out on others because they have been victimized too.

Child H told the researchers that his mother wanted him to attend a special high school for children with learning difficulties, and said, "My dad doesn't like me taking my ADHD pills 'cause they really are just drugs. He especially doesn't want me to go to a school just because I need help or something. I kinda agree with him too." He spoke about getting into trouble for fooling around in class. During one session, he told the researchers regarding another child in the Photography Club, "I've got a marker in my hand, ha ha! I was going to put it in his eye. I'm gonna draw on his face."

Child I. Child I was from a bilingual grade six class. He lived with his mother and father, older sister, and younger twin siblings. He had difficulty processing auditory information and had been bullied to the point where he received support for severe anxiety at the hospital two years before the study. The family was also receiving therapy from the local social services organization.

In the initial focus group meeting, the special project resource teacher commented that Child I came from a good home, and his English teacher said that his mother was supportive. During the focus group meeting held after the Photography Club, the special project resource teacher said that Child I was much more positive in his outlook than he had been previously. His English teacher commented that Child I was known for having frequent headaches and the school nurse was concerned about his nutrition. She said that Child I needed a lot of positive reinforcement. The teacher was aware that Child I did not sleep well at night and was often tired

and unfocused during the day. His French teacher was concerned that he needed help with organization, and his homework was often not done. To build his self-confidence and reduce his anxiety, the teachers tried to provide Child I with tasks where he could be successful and receive positive reinforcement.

In an interview with his mother, she said that Child I "cares more about other people's feelings than his own. He's always placed other people ahead of himself." She added, "He's a much better defender of others than defender of himself. I think that's something that empowers him." She spoke about his diagnosed anxiety,

> The end of grade two, I believe, when he thought he should kill himself, that's where this all started. At the end of grade three, I had to take him out of the last week or so of school, because he had a meltdown [and] I had to call the police. We thought he'd run away.

Child I's mother said that doing homework "would end up with both of us in tears, both of us screaming. It was pretty dreadful." Regarding Child I's learning, she said, "I think he puts up road blocks in his own mind. I know he uses the resource here and I know he appreciates it." She had a lot to say about the anti-bullying program at school,

> I even said that to Child I, if somebody hits you, hit them back. Because it was getting to be so bad, I said I will deal with the consequences, but I don't want you to feel like you have to take it anymore.

Parent I recounted her own experiences, "At some point you say, that's not acceptable behaviour, like you have no right to do that to me." She was concerned about the dynamics of bullying, "They're not doing this because they're feeling good. So how do you give that person consequences and yet build their self-esteem?"

Child I reiterated what his mother had said, “I put others’ needs before mine.” He knew he had auditory processing issues because in the first session he told the researcher, “I can’t stay in a room when it’s too noisy, cause if I do, it feels like my head is going to explode.” He was also aware of his learning issues. He said, “Things that are important like studying for a test, it’s like, nah, you don’t need to do this – just go play videogames. I have a lazy mind.” He said that he gets many headaches.

Child J. Child J was in a bilingual grade six class. He had been identified in Kindergarten as having a language-based learning disorder. He had social comprehension issues that led to referrals for support from a specialized program at the hospital. He was seeing a psychologist for family therapy. His parents separated several years previously, and he lived with his mother and younger sister. He saw his father regularly.

In the initial focus group meeting, Child J was one of the first children suggested for participation in the project by his French teacher. The special project resource teacher described him as coming from a good home. In the follow-up meeting, the special project resource teacher said that Child J had undergone a “metamorphosis” to become more positive and confident since the project. His English teacher described Child J as very artistic and liking science. She was concerned about his academic difficulties, and that he needed ongoing help with inappropriate behaviour.

In the interview with Child J’s mother, she expressed concerned that he often did not ‘get’ social cues. She noticed difficulties when he was in Kindergarten. She knew there were mental health issues in his father’s extended family and she wanted to be proactive in getting him help, which is why she had him evaluated right away when he started showing problems. She worried

that he would not be successful in high school without additional help, such as the use of a laptop. She said that he was vulnerable to being bullied and wanted the school to provide him with support and skills training. She was grateful for the project because it helped Child J clarify that he wants to be a filmmaker. She said that he was very proud of the work he had done and that he wanted to share it with all his family members.

During the eighth week of meetings, Child J was not able to remember the researcher's name. It was clear that he had a language disorder from much of his speech, for example, "Check, check this out – no bullying for like, for like, you know, the school, because like, our school is like, you know, had, is known also, to like, from bullying." He understood that his behaviour was different from other children, "I kinda stand out. That's why I started playing alone until, well actually, until this year."

Photography Club Interview Summaries by Child

The first research question is, 'How do students perceive their strengths and resources?' The next section will describe the thoughts and experiences the students shared with the researchers when they were prompted through presentation of the seven resilience themes to discuss their strengths and use of resources during the photography sessions.

Child A. Child A was a student in a specialized low-ratio class because of his behaviour difficulties. Due to chaotic family conditions, support agencies had been part of his life since birth. Despite environmental adversity, both school personnel and his mother felt that he was academically capable and creative. His teachers also said that he could be responsible when given a specific task.

During the sessions with the research team, it became clear that Child A loved listening to and performing music, but he seemed to find it difficult to share his talents and interests with the school. This may be linked to the fact that he seemed to think of himself as "a freak, a troublemaker." His negative self-identification may have also influenced his relationships, because he informed the researchers that he did not have any friends. Interestingly, the other relationships he talked about in a meaningful way revolved around adults who intervened with him regularly in terms of his behaviour. Even though the principal was in a disciplinary role, he still perceived her positively. He stated, "She's the best principal, she's nice and not mean and she's really kind. Sometimes I go talk with her. I feel important to her. She's always there for us." Considering his frequent visits to the office for violence, this positive relationship was an important resource for Child A. Although he sought out relationships with his peers, he could not maintain them due to his behaviour issues.

Child A seemed to be aware of his difficulties, telling the researchers, "Sometimes I get in a fight on the bus," but he was also able to have a positive perspective of the school in general. He said about the main door of the school, "Every time you come in, it's like you're entering a new world, and it makes me happy." His philosophy appeared to be reflected in his statement, "Everyone has a problem." According to Murray-Harvey and Slee (2010), stressful relationships negatively affect academic performance and social adjustment and are associated with bullying. For Child A, having access at school to strong, supportive relationships may be key to reducing bullying behaviours.

Child B. Child B was a concern to school staff because of her self-harming behaviours and suicidal ideation. Her mother felt that some of these emotional difficulties stemmed from her significant learning delays, but that her daughter was creative, loved sports, and was able to forgive

those who bullied her. It was clear that Child B had difficulty regulating her emotional responses, which have been found to be central to adaptive coping; children who have emotional dysfunction tend to act out or withdraw when overwhelmed (Mahady Wilton, Craig & Pepler, 2000).

Child B used educational resources to help her deal with bullying. She told the researchers that her favourite book was about a child "getting bullied, cause I got bullied in grade one – everyone made fun of me. Mom called the principal and the principal solved it." She said that when she was bullied she liked to sit by her favourite tree in the schoolyard; "He always helps me when I'm sad." It is evident from what Child B shared with the researchers that she did not know how to deal with social problems and would either become very dramatic or withdraw; studies have shown that three-quarters of children with learning difficulties have social skills deficits when compared to their peers (Kaukiainen et al., 2002).

Further evidence of social skills deficits was apparent when she talked about 'dating' a boy at school, how they broke up and got back together, and about "frenemies." She had a lot of issues with her peers, both males and females – they were best friends one day and sworn enemies the next, and this happened within the Photography Club as well, creating confusion and lack of trust between her and the other girl in the project.

Child B said, "I'm nervous when I talk to my old teachers. I don't really like this school – it's boring." However, she had a positive relationship with the technician assigned to her class; "I told her she's awesome. She likes to help people. I always help her, and she always helps me every morning." A close relationship with even one adult at school is related to children's resilience (Lee, Cheung & Kwong, 2012).

Child C. Child C was nominated for the project not only because of learning delays of more than two years, but because his perceptions were consistently at odds with what school personnel felt were clearly bullying behaviours. The 'different perception' mentioned by his teacher was evident in the following conversation with the researchers,

> I think I kinda have detention, but I don't – can you call it detention if a kid's going to punch somebody and you grab 'em before he does? And then I get in trouble for pulling him away. But they said go get a supervisor. I'm sorry, but do you wanna call home and say either your child is hurt, we had to call an ambulance, or your child's killed? I think that was the right thing to do. Hopefully I can get out of it because it's just nonsense if I don't.

He said in another session,

> At first when I joined hockey I didn't know how to skate. I'm very fast now. I can sometimes beat kids way smaller than me, so they had the advantage of height sort of, so they can go faster, and I still beat them.

He seemed to seek personal power and mastery, but he did not see a contradiction in that when he was smaller he did not know how to skate, much like the children he was boasting about beating. According to Kaukiainan and colleagues (2001), there is a lack of social awareness in the majority of children with learning difficulties, leading to bully-victim behaviour patterns.

Child C tended to talk about others in a negative way, although he claimed it was being "jokey"; for example, he told the researcher, "I'd tell my best friend, 'You yawn like a beluga whale – my sister!" When asked if he got along with her or with other members of his family that he mentioned, he replied, "Not really." In reference to a photo he took of another student, he said,

"I like this one because he's scared – I don't know why he was like that – made it fun." When another student wanted to draw a picture of Child C he responded, "Make me look like a psychopath." In an overview of research studies regarding bullying and difficulties, findings suggest that students with learning difficulties and emotional disorders frequently show inadequate social understanding, and that peer rejection can strengthen bully-victim behaviours that may be present in over fifty percent of these children (Bell Carter & Spencer, 2006).

Child D. Child D's mother had died several years previously, and she had been reintegrated in a regular classroom only at the beginning of the school year. She used computer video games to avoid dealing with significant conflict at home, for example, she recounted being pushed down the stairs by her sister. She said several times that she took certain photographs to "prove" to family that she had friends; "Because my sister's like, oh, you don't have no friends, you faker, you lie, you're alone all the time. I'm like, I'm just like, I have friends." However, she told the researchers,

> [A boy] wouldn't stop mentioning stuff about my mom one day and I got fed up and then I whacked him right in the mouth. I felt really bad for punching him cause he said sorry after we got in the big fight. So, I went in the principal's office – I'm like, just let it go, we don't have to be punished.

Her reactive behaviour may have reflected her family's culture, since she told the researchers, "Last year everyone used to tease me. My dad's like, do something about it – next time they hit you, you hit them back. I'm like, 'ok'." According to Varjas and colleagues (2008), children's perspectives may help the adults who are intervening understand how bullying develops. This same study found physical aggression to be more associated with boys than girls, similar to results of an analysis of gender differences in bullying (Isossi Silva, Pereira, Mendonca, Nunes &

Abadio de Oliveira (2013). Although girls may also engage in physical aggression, Child D may have reflected an unconscious contextualisation of perceived gender differences in bullying when she said, “I’m like a boy basically. I only like boy stuff,” or perhaps these statements were more indicative of gender identification issues. Ungar (2011) mentions that gender is sensitive to cultural variations provoked by social environments.

Access to educational resources helped Child D to deal with bullying that she experienced. She said that the library was one of her favourite places. She was proud that she participated in the Student Council because she suggested something for the school, and, “It actually did happen so it’s like the first time I ever got heard.” Through feelings of belonging and power and control within the school environment, Child D appeared to be accessing culturally relevant resilience as described by Ungar and his colleagues (2007).

Her self-identified strengths included music expression. When she shared one of her own songs with the researchers, it was clear that she had exceptional musical abilities. Despite this ability, one of her teachers told the researcher privately that, in her view, unless Child D changed her behaviour, this talent would not amount to anything. Contrary to the recommendation to cultivate resilience beliefs in children (Lee et al., 2009), this teacher appeared to believe that conduct problems were more salient to Child D’s future than her obvious musical ability.

Child E. Child E had repeated a grade due to learning difficulties, but his behaviour was more of a concern because he said that he “had to hurt someone,” and he did not seem to understand why his actions were wrong. He spent most of his free time doing videogames, which according to comments he made to the researchers, he knew were excessively violent. He was also involved in sports and played on a soccer team in the summer and on a hockey team in the winter. When he

was asked if he had friends from his sports teams, he said, "No, cause most of them, when I play hockey I play in [another town], so none of them go to school here." He talked about belonging to a boy's "gang" at school, and that "we used to always fight Child C's gang." According to Ungar and his colleagues (2007), finding ways to feel part of something bigger than the individual is an important tension for youth to resolve.

During the Photography Club, he got into several altercations with Child C, where they would talk negatively to each other and argue. At one point, the other child hit Child E. The researcher had to remind them both that the photo albums they were creating were not for the purposes of revenge. It was clear that even in groups of only two students, the children felt safe enough to behave naturally.

Child E shared that he had won an award for being the third fastest Speed Stacker in the school, but that he stopped because, "I was fed up with it sometime and at the competition it was sucky." There was a lot of community involvement and excitement around this televised competition. It is curious that an activity that brought Child E some positive notoriety became negative in his perception. However, he was proud that he had achieved the highest level of his videogames with "thousands of kills"; although this was also an individual achievement, he was involved in an online group of children who did gaming together. He said that he used to like to draw, but "it's not really the fashion to be cool, so now I mostly hang out with my friends, walk around." It was apparent that Child E was choosing to access resilience through relationships rather than from his previous identity as someone who liked to draw or who was good at Speed Stacks. According to Dryden and colleagues (1998), both children and teachers believe relationships most strongly promote resilience.

Child F. Child F had severe learning difficulties and his behaviour was such an issue that he had attended a specialised school during the year before the research project. He tended to look at things negatively. For example, he took a photo of a poster of an old and new classroom merging to show the continuity of education and interpreted it as saying, "that people cheat in class. People who are giving tests around the black market. The teacher is mad because everyone is cheating in her class." He also presented his self-image negatively; he asked to take a 'selfie' in a closet to show "the darkness, the devil – that would be awesome!" The safety of the unscripted exchanges with the researchers was clear when he talked about "I'm evil because it's funny," and when he asked a researcher to write for him saying, "I don't write well." It appears that his negative views may have acted as a protective mechanism for Child F, in other words, a form of resilience in the face of his challenges, as suggested by Ungar and colleagues (2007).

Child F had a hard time explaining what fairness was; "You do fairness by being fair." He took a photo of a school recognition ceremony photo and said,

> That's not fair. Cause it's like saying like girls are more intelligent than boys. It's saying the girls are better four times more than the boys, because there's four girls, one boy. Probably the teachers were girls, that's why they took girls. I would show the boys it's time to get revenge, by erasing them from the picture on the computer and putting boys.

According to Yeager and Dweck (2012), a child's negative perceptions of a situation can affect the impact of adversity on their outcomes. By stating that there was a predisposition for female teachers to choose female students for awards, Child F may have been seeking to rectify what he perceived to be situational injustice.

Child F did not want to invite any of his friends to see his photos. He wanted to invite the art teacher, but said, "I forgot her name." He also wanted to invite the former principal of the schools. He told the researchers that he did not want to invite members of his family to see his photography exhibition, "Cause my brother's annoying. I hate him." Resilience research found the quality of family life to be the most crucial contributor to the quality of important relationships within a specific context for a child (Lee, et al., 2010).

Child G. Child G had been a victim of abuse that led to her receiving in-hospital treatments on several occasions. Child G had repeated a grade and so she was older than most of the other children and dealing with pre-teen gender issues and relationships. She did not seem to know whom or how to trust, so during the sessions she often appeared to want to shock the other participants and the researchers. She would wear "Goth" makeup at school or sing about "running over fat kids with my van." She would eat non-food items or insist that the photographs given to her for scrapbooking were not hers. Child G appeared to seek for means to gain power and control regarding her unstable environment through creating a distinct identity that at times seemed in opposition to the social norms of her cultural community.

At the end of the project Child G told the researchers, "Why is it anytime I see the word 'goodbye' on anything it just brings me down? Because when you leave someone forever, you can't just say goodbye. You could say 'later.' She continued,

> There's three definitions of 'bye'. To buy something, to say goodbye, or bisexual. When I got older then I sorta thought I was a boy. Then I started getting into these dark things. Like I was in the wrong body. Technically didn't know that there was a word for that. Transgender. Now I'm confused.

She talked openly about suicide, “My mom caught me trying to hang myself with a rope. I still take pills because they’re supposed to make me happy.” When she was asked if there were any people at school whom she felt she could rely on she said, “No, not very much. I’ve been having this problem ever since I was tying to kill myself and hurt myself and thought no one liked me.” According to Dempsey, Haden, Goldman, Sivinski, and Wiens (2011), overt victimization has been associated with increased suicidal ideation and attempts, especially for students who experience feelings of social isolation.

Although she craved relationships, she did not know how to use people as a resource, so she would be hot/cold towards others. She spoke extensively about having ‘boyfriends’ and ‘dating’ but also said, “My friends hate me because I think that I’m a boy. I’m getting bullied – name called all the time.” She said that she dealt with bullying through nature, which was important due to her First Nations’ heritage. She said, “Trees remind me of the good times I had. Most of the time by myself. I’m scared of the indoors and I’m not afraid of the outside.”

There are many layers of experience evident in Child G’s discourse. Research has shown youth with gender dysphoria are overrepresented as victims of bullying (Daley, Solomon, Newman & Mishna, 2007). Additionally, these youth may also be dealing with issues related to race or ethnic identification that may complicate anti-bullying interventions based on “single identity constructions” (p.24).

Child H. Child H was known to bully others from a young age; his mother felt this was in retaliation for bullying that had been done to him. His family dynamic was complicated, in that he lived with his mother and only saw his father occasionally, yet his identity seemed to revolve around activities with his father. He was very proud of his First Nations heritage, and said,

> A lot of people don't believe that I'm black and native. But they believe that I'm Mi'kmaq because when they saw my dad they totally understood. And he's got a tattoo right behind his ear, and Indian tradition feather. Which is what I'm gonna get, and my older brother and my sister.

Although Child H did not physically present as an obvious member of a racial or cultural minority, he chose to base his identity on these characteristics. He also considered himself a protector, for example, "I was hitting a lot of people. They not respecting the rules of the bus." In the same conversation he said,

> If you wanna to have people to give respect to you, you need to give respect to them. My sister and some of my family, my siblings have a hard time with that. Besides, they're really weird and rude and mean. My brother, he's rude in a funny way. And my sister, she's rude in 'I hate you, you hate me' way. I wanna throw her out the window.

Despite his negative comments regarding his siblings, when asked where he felt he belonged he replied, "I don't necessarily belong to anybody but to my family." It is interesting that issues of injustice and inequality that Child H appears to be fighting for are culturally relevant to First Nations populations, according to Castleden, Garvin, and Huu-ay-aht First Nation (2008).

Child H was aware of his behaviour differences. He said a character in a book series about spirit animals, "acts so much like me. The other characters are telling him to stop fooling around." His favourite part of the school was the art room. He told the researcher, "I want to have my own business, selling for two dollars a bunch of my pictures." He said that he liked to draw,

> Maybe if I get into trouble or something. Maybe fooling around in class. Like at recess we were throwing a ball and I was holding it up, and the teacher just walked in. She thought it was a bad thing.

Despite his creative inclinations, he said that he did not want to show his photos because, "I don't think the other people who I want to show it to would want to know anything about it." When Child H was asked what was positive about school, he said, "Is there anything positive? Cause I don't know." His perspectives appear to reflect the findings that bullies and victims show deficits in social processing and emotional regulation (Camodeca & Goossens, 2005).

Child I. Child I was a victim of bullying, diagnosed with and treated for clinical anxiety. His mother shared that he had been suicidal in grade two, but his teachers did not appear to be aware of the severity of his anxiety and depression. His auditory processing difficulties prevented him from dealing with noise and from understanding ordinary conversations. His profile matched that of elementary school children who self-reported they were bullied in that he had weak social and emotional skills (Johnson, et al., 2002). He said he did not want to share his photos with anyone at school because, "It's like I don't want them to pick on me. Because they're like difficulties, like things that I can't do at all." According to Dryden and colleagues (1998), children 9 to 12 years old who were asked about resilience often mentioned difficulties (such as speech or appearance anomalies) that resulted in intimidation and bullying.

Child I was usually negative about his identity. He said, "I feel sad because I never won an award." Throughout the sessions, he made comments such as, "I'm not responsible. I don't trust myself and I don't think other people should trust me either." According to Yeager and Dweck (2012), children's negative interpretations of adverse situations may worsen outcomes.

Child I's negative self-concept may have been due in part to past bullying, but it also may have set him up for future bullying as well. He was vulnerable to being bullied online as well as at school, because one of his coping strategies when he could not sleep was to play games on the Internet. He recounted,

> There's like a lot of grown ups [online] and they say a lot of inappropriate stuff. Someone called me a B. I said thank you! A B is a female dog, and female dogs are part of nature, and nature is beautiful, so thank you! And he was like, 'Are you on a F-ing high?' And I was like, 'No!'

It is evident from the anecdote that Child I was trying to deal positively with the online name-calling. However, according to Mishna, Saini, and Solomon (2009), students from grades five to eight believed cyber-bullying to be more serious than 'traditional' bullying because of anonymity within the context of their online groups.

Child J. Child J was very excited about the photography project, although he decided that he wanted to do a video project instead, through interviewing his classmates and people in the school for their opinions and ideas. Child J had a language difficulty, but he had much to say. He asked the school secretary, "What do you think the kind of people that are friendly to you here?" When she did not understand the question, he clarified, "Like, do people, like, always be kind to you and all such?" According to Kaukiainen and colleagues (2002), children with learning difficulties may be victims or bullies because they have difficulty interpreting communication as well as weak social abilities that can lead to impulsive and possibly aggressive behaviours.

The research says that identity is one of the main ways which children find access to resilience (Ungar et al., 2007). Child J had a strong sense of identity in terms of being able to be

artistically creative. In fact, he said that when he was older he would like to have a career in film, which was partly inspired by the Photography Club. He shared that, "Well, being honest with myself, I am good at many things!" He said that he was one of the 'star' students, "I actually was in those, for an art award. You know people also really admire my drawings and I do myself too." According to Luther and Cicchetti (2000), "children in such stress-laden environments encounter relatively few experiences in their everyday lives that engender a positive sense of well-being, so that when such experiences do occur they can have a marked effect on children's adjustment" (p.860).

While doing the project, the janitor was one of the people he insisted on interviewing, and the connection that he had with him both at school and as a family friend was important. It is clear from the research that close relationships with important adults promotes resilience for children (Hunter, 2012). Child J also interviewed other students for his project, and asked one of them, "What would you think if they never knew about the old owners of the school?" Before the child could reply, he continued, "My advice for the Kindergarteners here is to always be good in class, not to disrupt the teacher as much, I learnt that myself." Child J then told the researcher, "Next time we're taking a girl. They have a whole lot to say." He interrupted others' replies often, as though talking to others was his way of creating a platform for his own ideas to be heard. This format was his own idea and initiative, and the researchers were pleased to support it.

Children's Perceptions of Resilience According to Themes

The next section will look at the thoughts and experiences the students shared with the researchers according to content analysis of the themes that were presented to them. These perceptions have been further broken down into subcategories within each theme, and they are listed by overall frequency of mentions.

Theme Identity "I'm good at…" These children identified positively with creative endeavours, team sports, and the outdoors, which are all areas where evaluation is minimal. The children identified the most with their hobbies, with drawing being mentioned by every student. Most students also mentioned reading, singing, playing and listening to music, and photography (through the research project). Other subcategories that arose were computers and sports. Nature was a category that was somewhat surprising, but several students mentioned animals and trees, with outdoor activities, such as snowshoeing, also being associated with Identity.

There were two distinct subcategories of Identity in the comments by the students – "I am," and "I'm good at," statements. The "I am" statements showed an awareness of their personal difficulties, but the children could still discuss positive aspects of themselves, and found places where they could shine, usually through a specific role. Most of the "I am" statements were negative: "a freak", "a troublemaker", "crazy", "lazy", "the devil", but some were positive: "like my dad", "a reporter for school", "a singer", "a photographer", "an office monitor." It is interesting that the negative statements about identity were character-based, whereas the positive comments were task-oriented. It is also interesting to note that two of the three girls participating in the project said that they were "like a boy." This is an area for further research, as there does not appear to be studies on gender identification and bullying.

Although it was felt that this next subcategory was best called, "I'm good at," there were more things that the students mentioned that they were *not* good at. For example, the child identified as a victim by school staff said that he had a hard time trusting. Child E took a photograph of the computer at school, because he felt, as did several other children, that one of his strengths was using technology, and playing video games (see Figure 1.). The flexible methodology allowed the children to freely speak on what they wanted. It is interesting that they

tended to talk about what they were not good at, rather than the positives. Both bullies and victims have been found to have low self-esteem (Smith, Cousins, & Stewart, 2005); this appears to be the case with the children in this study.

Figure 1. Theme: Identity "I am good at computers" Child E

Theme Educational Resources "I learn…" Access to resources, including educational opportunities, is very important for the development of resilience (Ungar et al, 2007). Many students in this study noticed awards – although they were not happening frequently, they were very aware that they were being given to others. This suggests that school-based recognition of what these students can do well would help promote resilience.

The Character Pillars were mentioned frequently as part of Educational Resources, but the children do not appear to understand what the abstract concepts mean in real terms, even though they form the key prevention component of the ABAV plans for both schools. For example, one student said that Fairness was "the book fair" at school.

Subcategories that arose from the content analysis included "After/Before School" with the bus being mentioned most frequently (half the students), although it was a negative experience for two of them due to bullying. They also participated in daycare, school choir, and clubs. The school building was another subcategory, with gym class mentioned most frequently. These children seemed to view the buildings positively as places where they were able to be active, creative, and have more autonomy.

Learning was another subcategory that appeared; books and reading were mentioned by most of the students, with music following. For example, Figure 2. shows Child B's photograph of the book she said helped her deal with bullying. "Helpers" with learning were also named, such as the technicians, teachers, and the principals. Interestingly, most students mentioned Kindergarten as important, perhaps due to its non-evaluative nature. The availability of assistance was another aspect identified as important to facilitating resilience according to Ungar and his colleagues (2007).

Figure 2. Theme: Educational Resources "My favourite book" Child B

Theme Social Equality "Fairness is…" When asked about fairness, the students tended to bring up the issue of having to do what they did not want to do (things that are unfair), indicating that the concept was perceived in negative rather than positive terms. In a discussion about fairness, two students from the rural school mentioned that some students were making fun of a teacher based on her last name, so the other students began calling her "Miss Susan" (pseudonym), contrary to the school's culture of using last names for adults. In contrast to this 'protector' stance, in each school two students fought with each other during the group sessions and called it 'bullying.' It is clear that these students tried to take a 'protector' role in one circumstance but did not see their own behaviour as bullying in another. This suggests that not only is bullying behaviour contextually linked, but also that these students are socially blind to their own acts.[2]

The main subcategory of the Social Equality theme that arose was feelings. The primary feeling expressed by most of the students was, "It's not my fault." This was followed by being called names and the idea of taking revenge. Over half the students mentioned being bullied or bullying and someone "being mean to me". Other feelings mentioned were someone stealing ideas, being annoyed, not being able to trust others, hating someone, and someone feeling he or she was "better than" another child. The most commonly associated emotion with both bullying and victimisation is anger (Camodeca & Goossens, 2005); the children in the project seemed to reflect this finding in their emotional reactions to bullying situations.

School was the next important subcategory. Arguing with another child in the project about what was "fair" occurred in a few group sessions at both schools. The importance of school teams

[2] According to the MacMillan Dictionary, the term "socially blind" is defined as "unaware of the feelings and intentions of others, and so behaving in a way that other people find difficult" (https://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/socially-blind)

being fair, cheating in class, “watching out” for Kindergarten students, comparing to others, and bus rules were also mentioned. Fairness also related to sports, with many children mentioning the need for balanced teams to be fair. However, when discussing fairness, people were mentioned only in a negative sense of ‘not being fair’. This is an interesting finding, as there is likely some effect on their daily lives if the at-risk children perceive the main people within their environments as being unfair. The literature is ambiguous (e.g., Spears Brown & Bigler, 2005), as research on perceptions of fairness tends to deal with discrimination, which is not analogous to ‘unfairness’ within this context.

Gender was a prominent subcategory: having male versus female friends; not being treated fairly because of feeling more like a boy (stated by two of the three girls in the study); gymnastics not being fair because it’s “girls’ stuff”; and girls and boys being treated or perceived differently by school staff. It does not appear that these differences in perceptions regarding gender have been investigated yet, but it may be a fruitful avenue to pursue.

Figure 3. Theme: Social Equality “We did something together” Child F

Theme Cohesion "I belong…" For the theme of Cohesion, it was apparent that the children were looking for ways to belong, even in a small group, with most students mentioning their own classes. The next most common responses regarding where they feel they belong were their hometowns and school clubs. For school clubs, one child mentioned the issue of gender, saying that the boys would play certain games that the girls would not be interested in playing. Gender was also mentioned with respect to being on sports teams, and for belonging in other ways as well, for example being in a boys' "gang". Note that the researchers did not follow up on the exact way in which the children defined these "gangs"; what was important was the feeling of exclusion being expressed by the participants. The subcategories that appeared from the analysis regarding belonging included community, school, sports, shared interests, and relationships. Shared interests included: playing videogames online, watching certain TV shows, singing in a group, group art projects, sports, and reading.

The places the students said they belonged came from both the school and the community. They also said they belonged due to special jobs at school, such as being a lunchroom worker or office monitor. At school, they seemed to feel more positive if given a specific, attainable task that provided structure in unstructured times. If they had a role, then there was a script and it became easier to negotiate that part of the day. Only at the suburban school did a few students mention belonging to their families. Elements of cohesion such as a sense of responsibility and feeling of belonging to something larger than themselves lead to resilience (Ungar et al., 2007).

Figure 4. Theme: Cohesion "I belong in my class" Child D

Theme Cultural Adherence "I am proud that…" This theme appeared to be strongly related to a sense of belonging (Cohesion theme). Regarding school, the children mentioned activities that were related to non-academic school-wide special days, such as the annual Terry Fox Run for cancer research, that promote awareness of the challenges other people face. Doing activities with fathers, playing and watching hockey, and doing activities based on First Nations traditions were also important sources of culture and pride (see Figure 5. Child G's photograph of a model of a First Nations village). Outdoor activities appeared to have cultural significance as well. Fostering participation in these types of activities may increase vulnerable children's access to positive associations and increase their resilience. For children participating in outdoor programs, increased self-esteem and coping have been found (Ungar, Dumond & McDonald, 2005).

Figure 5. Theme: Cultural Adherence “My traditions” Child G

Theme Power and Control “I can change…” Most of the comments made by the children referred to the Photography Club, with respect to taking pictures and being with the researchers. Because the Photography Club gave the children more agency, they were always negotiating with the researchers. This negotiation helped the children express what they wanted to express, and not just respond to the questions being asked. The children mentioned difficulties with noise, worries about “screwing up”, suspensions for behavior, having to re-do work, and asking for help to write or say something. They also mentioned the positive effects of doing things with friends, using their talents and skills, and using nature to help deal with emotions. They talked about helping others, being responsible, making choices, and about having a ‘say’ as part of the school community. It is interesting that the photograph Child H took to show the playground was taken through a screened window (see Figure 6.). Although it was not discussed in the interview, he could not have chosen a clearer indication that he felt freer outside.

Figure 6. Theme: Power and Control "I feel better outside" Child H

Theme Relationships "I can count on…" All of the students mentioned their fathers, although they lived with their mothers if their parents were not together. Pets were mentioned more frequently than extended family members were, although they both appeared to be important elements of the children's support network. Almost all the students mentioned family and friends, but there were frequent negative comments regarding friends, siblings, cousins, and stepparents. More than one student commented "I don't have any friends right now," and several told the researchers, "You are my friend." Two of the three girls participating in the project mentioned a "boyfriend" that they were dating; it appears that the need for special or unique relationships was strong for these girls. Specific research into this area may be helpful in identifying the aspects of these relationships that lead to increased resilience.

It was also evident that the specialists (technology teacher, music teacher, and gym teacher) were very important to the students. Former teachers were mentioned more than current teachers were. Former principals were mentioned as well. Although the behaviour technicians were often

mentioned, it was not always positively, for instance because, “she makes me do stuff I don’t want to do.”

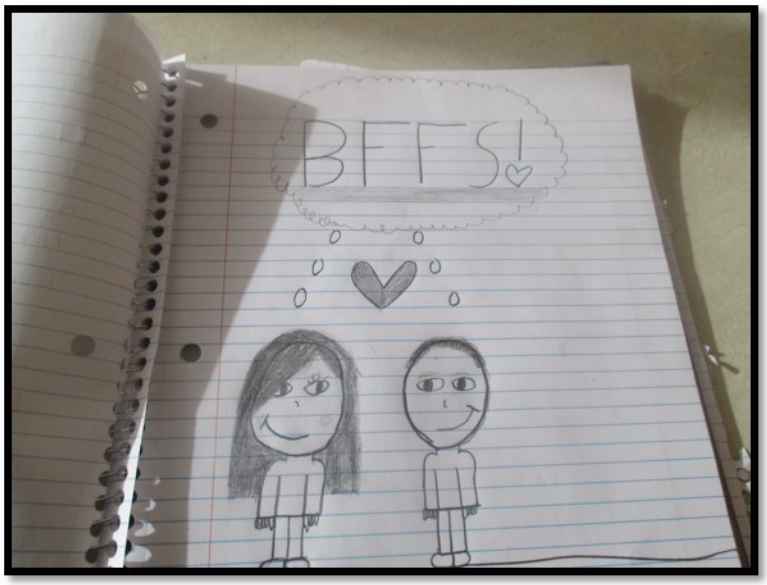
When their ideas became difficult to express, several students in both schools named random objects such as a chair, a donut, and even the researchers, “Bob.” This, along with other forms of humour, arose when the children felt discomfort with a topic or situation. Humour seemed to be a way to try to distance themselves from uncomfortable situations. According to Geisler and Weber (2010), humour allows for cognitive shifts that provide distance from possible threats and introduce positive emotions into negative situations.

There was a clear difference in the findings between the rural and suburban schools for the Relationships theme. At the rural school, significant relationships were with the school staff, their friends, and the researchers (see Figure 7. “I can count on my friends” Child D). The gym teacher, “lunch lady”, and parent volunteers, were mentioned only at this school. Talking about family members was rare. It may be that this was due to extensive family and community bonds between the children and school staff at this school. Relationships within the rural community were frequently complicated by poverty and unemployment, and according to Leadbeater and colleagues (2013), rural “families may rely heavily on schools for mental health promotion and early intervention” (p.44) due to lack of access to resources.

At the suburban school, talking about family members was common, especially relationships and activities with fathers. They also spoke about friends, their cultural communities, and school staff from past years. At this school, there was less interrelationship between school staff and families, which may have affected the children’s conversations with the researchers. It may be that the children spoke about their fathers because mothers were more of a constant

presence, whereas fathers did not necessarily live with their children. These findings suggest that engaging fathers in their at-risk children's lives may increase children's resilience in the face of bullying and victimization, as recommended by Fagan, Palkovitz, Roy and Farrie (2009).

Figure 7. Theme: Relationships "I can count on my friends" Child D



General overview of children's perceptions according to themes. There were associated concepts arising from the data analysis that deserve attention. Although the project was designed to look for positives in the perceptions of these students, negative comments were noted for all of the themes, with the exception of Cultural Adherence. The next theme with the most positive comments was Educational Resources. Since this theme had one of the most mentions, it may be that the positive aspects of school are the easiest to access for these students. These would include activities that occur before and after school, places within the school, having access to books and reading, performing music, having adult help with learning, and being helpers with the Kindergarten students.

For the rural school, every child mentioned something negative about Relationships. At the suburban school, all the children made negative comments regarding Identity, while using the phrase "I can't…" Identity was the theme with the highest number of negative comments for both schools. Negative comments were rare for Educational Resources and Cohesion. It appears that identity and relationships link to the most salient aspects of resilience to for these at-risk children, and this is another area that would benefit from direct investigation.

Another concept that arose from the analysis was that of Gender. Regarding Identity, two girls stated that they felt more like boys. This seems an important finding, considering that there were only three girls in the study. The gender-based comments relating to Cohesion were associated with belonging to a sports team or a 'gang' of friends. The gender-based statements that appeared to be associated with Social Equality were linked to ideas of fairness; a feeling that girls were treated preferentially by school personnel for awards and positive recognition; that girls were not accepted in certain sports, such as football; that there needed to be places within the schools that were exclusively for boys or for girls. As this aspect has not yet been examined, it would be useful to research gender as it relates to resilience within the contexts of identity, belonging, and social equality.

One of the most important findings from the analysis is that Relationships are at the core of all the resilience themes, except for Identity. Within the Relationships theme, the main subcategories were clearly School, Family, and Friends. Comments regarding family members occurred for half of the responses relating to Relationships, and school personnel almost as often, but more statements that are positive were made about school personnel than about family members. School staff and family members were mentioned approximately twice as often as friends, but within the subcategory of friends, more negative statements were made. These findings

suggest that issues with friends may be more conflictual when compared with relationships with school staff and family members.

Themes that showed high numbers of positive comments were Educational Resources, Cultural Adherence, and Cohesion. There were approximately three positive comments for each negative comment in the themes of Identity, Power and Control, and the subcategory of Friends within the Relationships theme. Social Equality had one positive for every negative comment, and more than half of all negative comments came from the subcategory of Family within the Relationships theme. It may be that providing more support to at-risk students regarding their identity, access to power and control, and understanding of fairness would increase their resilience. Resources to support peer and family relationships appear to be another possible way to boost resilience.

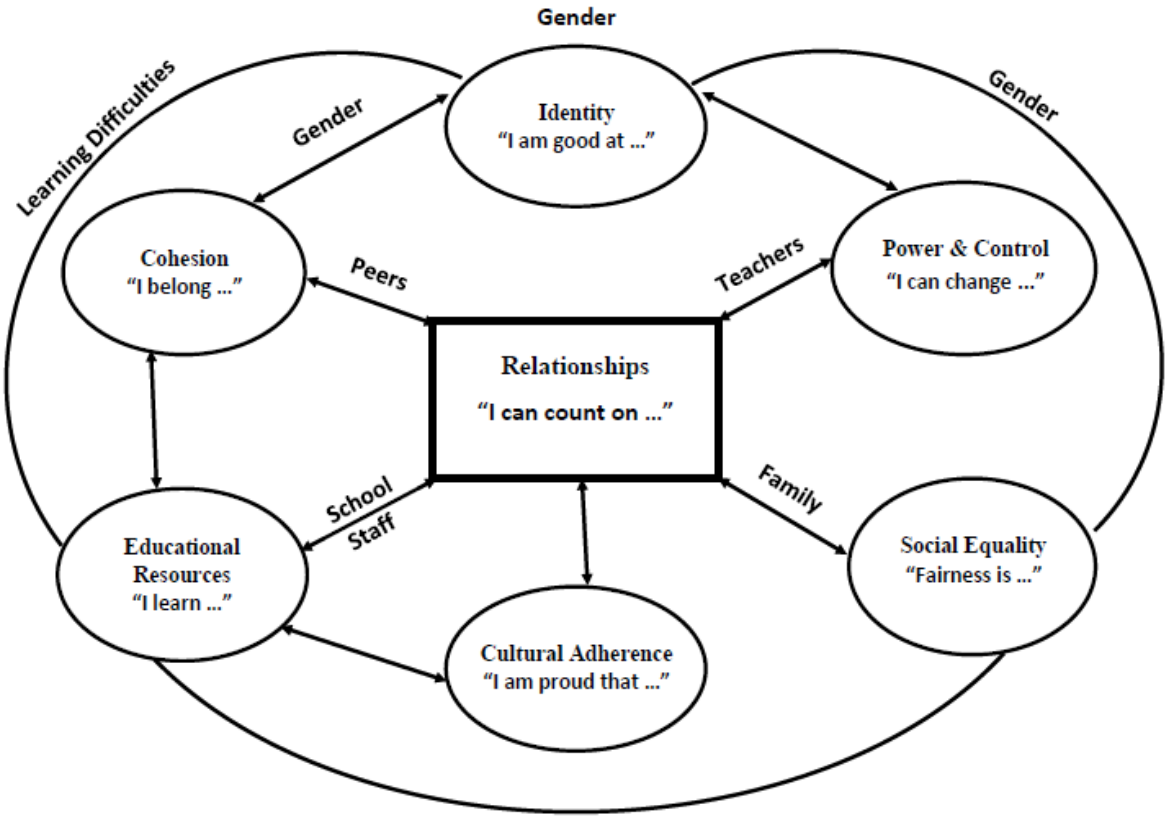
In looking at the patterns within the subcategories that were found regarding Relationships, the children usually mentioned teachers, principals, and other support staff when talking about accessing Educational Resources. The children mentioned teachers most often when discussing matters of Power and Control. They talked about family, friends, and teachers in relation to Cultural Adherence, and family members when addressing issues of Social Equality (although the comments were mainly negative in nature). They often spoke about their peers at school when talking about Cohesion.

Based on content analysis, these children found positive means for accessing resilience through sports, computers, and cultural activities. Additionally, because gender was a neutral but still potent concept for them, student input about gender perceptions should be considered when planning interventions. Content analysis also pointed to the children's negative perceptions of their

learning difficulties potentially becoming more positive through addressing power and control and identity concerns.

From these perspectives, the roles of certain people and specific aspects of the children impact access to resilience. The following is a representation of these connections. The lines attaching the resilience themes indicate moderating sub-categories between these themes that were evident from the content analysis.

Figure 8. Connections between Resilience Themes



Parent Perceptions of Their Children and Resilience in the Context of Bullying

Parents of students who were identified as having learning difficulties and an involvement in bullying participated in an interview at the end of the project to share their perceptions of their

children and the anti-bullying intervention programs at the schools. The interviewed parents were very open and communicative about their children's difficulties and strengths. Parents were more sympathetic to their child's bullying situations at school and leaned toward discussing their victimization. Some parents referred to their own experiences with bullying victimization.

While some parents were very accommodating and met early to do the interviews, for other parents it was difficult to find time to meet, and one parent did not respond at all to invitations to meet. The following section summarises the interviews. In addition to their perceptions, the parents often recounted having sought out and received additional support outside the school setting for their children; for example, art therapy, psychoeducation, or social work services. Some parents reported that their children were diagnosed at the hospital with anxiety and severe depression.

When asked about their perceptions of children's strengths and use of resources, the parents' responses included love of music, abilities for playing videogames or doing online activities, curiosity to learn new things, emotional sensitivity, creativity doing artistic endeavours, love of sports, and perseverance at trying new things. A third of the parents mentioned that their child had a good relationship with a specific teacher or with the principal. For example, Parent J said, "He's really come along this year in his class. I think his teacher 'gets' him."

Most of the parents said they were sad the project was completed and wished their child could continue in the project for the following year, even for those students who were moving on to high school. They also indicated that participation in the Photography Club had been a positive experience for their children, not only for their self-esteem but for their overall behaviour as well. Parent D said, "Since she's been into this program she's actually changed like 100 percent."

However, the parents also mentioned many concerns regarding their children. These included their difficulties in making consistent and independent efforts for school work; the bullying that took place where teachers were not aware and did not intervene; the challenges in managing their emotions; getting into trouble by saying or doing things without considering the consequences; putting social aspects before school work; noise sensitivities at school; low self-esteem; fear that their children had been "labeled"; worry that their children did not communicate how often they were being bullied at school; fear about cyber-bullying; and their children's anxiety about school performance or behaviour issues.

Half of the parents mentioned their child's identification as a student with learning difficulties as part of their identities, but all the parents mentioned hobbies and their child's creativity. A third of the parents also mentioned that their child had taken on the role of being a "protector" towards other children they felt were vulnerable, through looking out for the Kindergarten students or making sure people were behaving on the bus.

The parents discussed their connections with the schools, and most often mentioned difficulties doing homework. Additionally, parents wanted improved home/school communication and for children to do hands-on projects instead of written work. They did appreciate their children receiving one-on-one adult help at school. Parent H said, "He benefits from having someone sit with him while he works."

The parents often shared positive details about relationships with immediate family members, extended family members, pets, teachers, friends, and the school resource team. They also brought up difficulties with relationships for siblings and friends. Parent B told the researcher, "I'm sure she wishes she was an only child. She still finds it difficult adapting to her brother."

Most parents talked about their children's emotional regulation problems, difficulties asking for help and working independently, troubles with thinking before acting or speaking, and challenges working with others. According to their parents, their children felt a sense of belonging to the project or to sports teams; these were the only things specified. One issue a parent brought up that was distinct to the cultural context of the children in this study, was the bullying that took place unchecked on the school bus, because the driver was unilingual French-speaking. Parent I explained, "Because the bus driver wasn't aware and if he isn't fully bilingual and you have kids who can't express themselves when they're in a very emotional state, you know all the kids on the bus saw but nothing was done."

Parent perceptions of the anti-bullying programs. It is interesting that although most of the parents said their child had experienced bullying, there was some confusion as to what bullying looks like. Parents talked about being unsure if their child was being bullied or if it was "just bugging" (Parent H) between friends. Even with this uncertainty, most parents acknowledged that bullies can also be victims. This may have to do with the experiences of their children, since most of the children were not clearly bully or victim within the school context.

In addition, most parents were not aware that there was an anti-bullying policy or program at their child's school. One parent felt the need to step in herself and spoke to the bully's parent directly to solve the issue. Another parent felt the school was not willing to take charge of the situation until she threatened to call the police. It appears these parents may not have trusted that the school would handle the bullying their child was experiencing.

On the other hand, parents reacted positively during the interview when they became aware of the ABAV program. Parent F mentioned that she felt it helped to "open the eyes" of the children.

Another parent commented that she felt it made a difference, because her daughter told her she felt sorry for a boy who had been bothering her all year long. However, Parent I commented that her son would not feel that the ABAV program was making a difference, "Because kids are getting away with saying and doing things and they're not being expelled, so for him, he doesn't see it working." This sentiment was reflected when other parents talked about taking action themselves and leads to reflections about the levels of trust and communication between home and school; this area has not been researched except from the perceptions of teachers (see Ho Sui Chu, 2007).

School Staff Perceptions of the Children's Experience of Bullying According to Focus Groups

School personnel who were involved with children in the project were asked to participate in two focus groups: one at the beginning of the project, and another at the end. The resource team consisted of the principal, the school psychologist, the resource coordinator, and special education technicians. The focus groups took place with students' teachers, resource team members, technicians, and ABAV school committee chairpersons. After they had signed consent to participate in the study, they were invited to share their perceptions of these students as learners and to discuss emerging themes about family-school collaboration, as well as the goals of the school interventions and the impact of the bullying interventions on students. They were also asked for input regarding project goals and suggestions for participants. In the follow-up focus group meetings they were asked for their perceptions regarding the project and the students who participated in it.

For both schools, in the first focus group meeting, the children who were identified as candidates for participation were described as being helpful to others and creative. In these initial meetings, both schools noted that relationships between home and school could be problematic.

Learning issues were identified as being mainly comprehension and reading problems, focusing and attention problems such as ADHD, and difficulties managing or expressing emotions. The following section describes more specific information regarding each school.

The suburban school. During the initial meeting, several staff members said they were happy that parents were being included in the study because they saw support from home as an important issue. The principal gave details of the ABAV plan, which included serving detentions, writing "reflections" and using "passports". One teacher mentioned that the ABAV Plan uses the Character Pillars program to focus on building and repairing relationships and "making better choices" as well as awareness and ownership; "Own it, fix it, learn from it, and make restitution." She believed that the Character Pillars program was liked by parents because the children were "more accountable," especially with respect to impulsivity issues. At the initial meeting, the teachers each spoke about these students' strengths in general terms:

> We see the self-confidence is rolling when they're proud of their work. They like to make us happy. They're eager to please. And they're creative. They like working with younger kids. They have a generous spirit. And they can be so polite. Because they know that they won't shine with their marks, they shine in a different way. They offer help and they are always the first one to volunteer.

By identifying the children's strengths, the teachers showed awareness of protective possibilities, however it was not clear if they were aware that "many personal characteristics that may seem to reside in the child are in fact continually shaped by interactions between the child and aspects of his or her environment" (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000, p.863).

In the follow-up meeting, which took place after the students had presented their photography to their invited guests, the teachers recognized that most of the students who participated in the project did not want classmates to see their projects, but it was important that family members saw their work. One of the teachers spoke how she now felt the ABAV plan would probably best be introduced to the parents of children who are involved in bullying by someone who already has a relationship with the family. Although the focus group's initial impression was that support from home was lacking, it was apparent that the children were more invested in presenting to their families than to school staff. As well, initial perception was that parents valued the Character Pillars program, whereas parents were mostly unaware of it.

The rural school. During the initial meeting, the resource teacher stated that building a home-school relationship with families takes a long time, even years, especially for trust to grow. Another teacher said that for the families being discussed, many were in crisis, and that the children's parents might be afraid that there could be judgment and potential threat of losing custody of their children whenever the school tries to intervene. However, another staff member said that, "Although their parenting can be messy, these families really do love their kids." There seemed to be an understanding of the broader context in which these children found themselves, because of complex family and community relationships that had existed for many years.

During the initial focus group, each member of the staff described the nominated children from rural school as having these strengths: "The kids like participating," "They are appreciative." "They are willing to try," "They are knowledgeable," "They like music," and "They like to make others laugh." These children were described as being "very imaginative."

In the follow-up meeting that took place after the children's presentations of their photography projects, it became evident that some teachers had been looking for an immediate positive impact because of students' participation in the study and did not see behaviour changes in the classroom. Their comments indicated that they were confused as to the project's research objectives. Although the project was an exploratory study to understand and analyse children's perceptions of resilience within the context of bullying, it appeared that as a group, the staff had understood it to be an intervention program to fix children's behaviour problems rather than an investigation into perceptions of the children and their experiences at school concerning bullying situations.

Discussion

The goal of this study has been to provide important insights into the perceptions of resilience in children with learning difficulties who have been involved in bullying, and how these perceptions may be facilitated by the systemic ecology that promotes and sustains anti-bullying initiatives within schools. Resilience in youth draws on resources embedded in their culture and contexts (Cameron et al., 2003). This study looked at students' sociocultural context at the mesosystemic level, through the interplay between students, their families, and school personnel, as recommended by Bronfenbrenner (1979). Allowing the child to guide the conversations led to more autonomy and creative control; photography was just the tool used by the researchers.

Research by Angelkovski (2016) suggests that resilience influences the distinction between individuals who do well and those who do not. Bradshaw and Johnson (2011) state that it is relevant to learn "about bullying from multiple informants, as individuals' views vary as a function of their role within the school" (p.110). This research project was designed to answer specific

questions regarding how vulnerable children perceive their strengths and resources, how school personnel and their parents see manifestations of resilience in these students, and how mandated anti-bullying programs are promoting the resilience of 'at risk' students.

Perceptions of Resilience

The general societal perception of resilience still seems to be that of an innate characteristic, yet research on resilience has found that context, circumstances, and environment are all important factors as to whether someone will rise above their negative situation and be successful. Children with learning difficulties are vulnerable and those who have been involved in bullying are even more exposed to risk. It has been found that children who are involved in bullying are emotionally affected negatively even as adults (Lereya, Copeland, Costello, & Wolke, 2015). It is important, therefore, to examine the perceptions of resilience of the children themselves, of their parents, and of those who work with them on a regular basis at school. This study hopes to provide insight into whether, by focusing on positive factors and helping children to make links and negotiate access to resources, teachers and parents could assist children with learning difficulties to connect to helpful resources with respect to bullying situations.

School staff and parent perceptions of children's challenges and resilience. All participants, including the children themselves, spoke about how these students love to be helpful, enjoy caring for younger children, are creative, and love music. Every participant group also mentioned challenges with doing schoolwork, which is understandable considering all the participants were chosen for having learning difficulties.

There was consensus for both school staff and parents that although these children had difficulty with emotional sensitivity and regulation, they all shared strength in their willingness to

try. However, even though several parents were adamant that bullies could be victims as well, none of the school staff reflected this idea in the focus group meetings. Another difference in perceptions was that teachers at the rural school commented that they felt that there had been no positive changes in the students' behaviours, but most parents from both schools said that their children's participation had been a good experience that had led to increased self-esteem and improved behaviours. At the rural school, rules and values were not part of the discussions, but personal experiences were key. This focus on individuals may have been an element of the underlying ethos leading the students of the rural school to mention relationships with the school staff more often than with their families.

The teachers at the suburban school believed the Character Pillars program that is the core of the ABAV plans, was liked by parents because it made children more accountable, especially for their impulsivity issues. This is in direct contrast to the parents who felt that one of the main challenges their children faced was difficulty seeing the consequences of their behaviours. However, none of the parents mentioned the Character Pillars program. Indeed, when questioned by the researcher, several parents said that they felt the ABAV plan was not effective; one parent said this was because there were no obvious or consistent consequences to bullying behaviours, and that having to say 'sorry' was more of a permission to continue bullying than an incentive to change.

When looking at the transcripts from Focus Group meetings, it is interesting to note that at the suburban school there was a lot of discussion around the importance of school values, and much talk around the development of character, in other words, building aspects or structures within children that encourage compliance with these values and rules. This raises the question of whether this focus was a reason most of the students did not want their teachers or their classmates

at the suburban school to see their projects and called their work "private." There was also a perception of the staff members at this school that the Character Pillars program helps the students build and repair relationships, but there was no discussion of how this takes place. It seems that the Character Pillars program may not translate into integrated and clear actions in the everyday lives of these children at this school. In fact, there was no definitive relationship between the way the program was presented and the everyday lives of the students.

It was apparent in the interviews that giving parents a place for their voices to be heard was empowering for them. Those who participated not only shared their perceptions regarding their children and their children's schools but offered their personal experiences as well. Just as teachers were concerned about parent involvement with the schools, some parents mentioned feeling unsupported by school staff with respect to dealing with the bullying situations their children were facing. On the constructive side, some parents mentioned how much they appreciated the school resource team who had been there for their children from young age.

Strengths that parents and children mentioned included doing hobbies, being creative, using computers, and playing sports. Both groups also mentioned they were glad to have had access to staff members who worked one-on-one with the children. The parents and their children alike talked about difficulties with relationships (with family members, friends, and peers at school), being victims of bullying, and suicidal ideation. It seems that the school teams may not have considered the impact of suicidal thinking on these children's and their families' daily lives, although they were aware that certain students needed hospital intervention for anxiety and suicide attempts. According to Dempsey and colleagues (2011), bullying victims who feel helpless and do not have reliable access to social support show increased suicidal ideation. Providing reliable access to mental health supports within the schools may be an important consideration for students

with learning difficulties and social issues. According to Collier, van Beuesekom, Bos and Sandfort (2013), there may be an assumption that negative outcomes are the result of peer victimization, but perhaps adjustment problems precede victimization or "mutually reinforce one another" (p. 15). Table One summarises the shared perceptions mentioned above among the three groups of respondents: children, parents, and school personnel.

Table One: Shared Perceptions Between Children (Self), Parents, and School Personnel

<table>
<tr><th></th><th>Children (Self)</th><th>Parents</th><th>School Personnel</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="4">Shared Positive Perceptions</td><td colspan="3">• Love to be helpful
• Are creative
• Love music
• Like to care for younger children</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">• Enjoy hobbies
• Like computers
• Participate in sports
• Do well with one-on-one adult help for schoolwork</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td colspan="2">• Are willing to try</td></tr>
<tr><td></td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Shared Negative Perceptions</td><td colspan="3">• Have difficulties with schoolwork
• Have relationship difficulties</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td colspan="2">• Have emotional regulation and learning problems</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">• Are victims of bullying
• Deal with suicidal ideation</td><td></td></tr>
</table>

Children's perceptions of challenges and resilience. The directed content analysis led to the theme of *Identity* being separated into two distinct categories of "I am…" and "I'm good at…" Within the first category of "I am…" it was apparent that the negative associations were mostly trait-based, for example, "I am evil", whereas the positive associations were task-oriented, "I am a lunch monitor." For the category of "I'm good at…" the negative comments were linked to

school-based tasks, such as writing, and emotions, such as trusting others. The positive comments were related to extra-curricular activities or specialities at school, such as art, sports, music and technology. It appears that these children were able to access resilience when they were given specific and meaningful tasks to do within the school, and when they were able to participate in ways that did not require academic skills. Although these children have a hard time in unstructured social environments such as recess, they seemed to enjoy more structured, rule-based social activities.

With respect to the theme of *Social Equality*, learning fairness through sports was a very important concept for these children. This may have been because their learning difficulties means they do not have the language skills to discuss this idea in general. The students called it 'bullying' when they were in conflict with another student; some parents addressed this challenge when they noted that it was difficult to see when it was actual bullying, or when it was "just bugging between friends" (Parent B). It appears that the students cannot separate their feelings of being harmed according to others' intentions, and the conflicts remain unresolved because they do not know how to negotiate, and problem solve. Several children who stated, "It's not my fault," reflected this lack of ability to separate feelings from intentions. This is consistent with the definitional complexity of bullying as described by Mishna (2004).

Regarding *Power and Control*, the children's comments showed that they were very aware of their limitations but could still name some positive aspects. Several children and a few of their parents mentioned suicidal ideation; but despite the depth of their emotional pain and how vulnerable they were, it did not prevent them from being able to discuss positives in their lives. The finding that the themes of Power and Control and Relationships were linked through teachers indicates that they are the people who regulate this interaction for the children. However, the

teachers did not appear to be aware of the levels of distress that the children and their parents were experiencing.

Within the theme of *Educational Resources*, a surprise finding was the significance of Kindergarten to these students, with the majority mentioning how important it was. It may be because this is the last of play-oriented and relationship-based activities that provide non-judgmental opportunities for self-expression and comfort. Another surprise was that children with reading delays often mentioned the library as a 'safe space', and reading was an important activity they said they used to cope with bullying situations. However, perhaps having access to a non-evaluative space allows for enjoyment of reading, and the increased personal control leads to motivation. This may be another area for further investigation: how reading for pleasure allows for access to resilience resources, through identification with fictional characters, as related by several students in this study. According to Fisher (2013), reading is fostered through intrinsic motivation, which itself is supported by the reader's feelings of competence, autonomy, and relatedness, arguably conditions that are present when a child reads for pleasure rather than academics.

One of the complaints that arose frequently from the students was that of not getting awards. In the initial focus group meeting for the suburban school the comment was made by a staff member, "Because they know they won't shine with their marks, they shine in a different way." Unfortunately, it appears that these children were not aware of how they were shining differently, because they only seemed to notice that they were not getting recognition in the form of awards. According to a meta-analysis of 128 studies, extrinsic and task-contingent rewards are widely used in schools despite undermining intrinsic motivation in children due to their ability to decrease perceived competence (Deci, Koestner & Ryan, 2001). Perceptions of self-efficacy affect

motivation (Zimmerman, 2000), so what these children tell themselves about not receiving an award ultimately affects their motivation to improve.

For the children in this study, although they all took pictures of the Character Pillars, they were rarely able to define concepts associated with them in coherent ways. One student even said that 'fairness' meant the school's book fair. They did not appear to have the comprehension to internalize abstract concepts in such a way that they are able to, for example, use the notion of *Respect* as a resource in a bullying situation.

With regard to *Relationships*, the specialists (technology teacher, music teacher, etc.) were important to the students, possibly because they are the only constants throughout all the grades and provide continuity for the students. Time with fathers appeared to be very precious to these children, perhaps because they lived mainly with their mothers.

A phenomenon that arose in both schools within the *Relationships* theme was the naming of objects and people "Bob," who was a character from a popular animated movie. The research coordinator described it as a way the children used to calm their uncertainty toward the recorder and showed a fun side of their rapport. Eventually it became a form of ownership, an inside joke that was associated with the Photography Club.

The *Relationships* theme's comments were more negative from the rural school. This may have been due to the safety of being able to share difficult feelings about friends and family with the researchers. It also may have been that the researchers were considered part of the school community, and the children avoided negative statements about school personnel because of where the interviews took place. Another possibility might be that for these children, positive relationships were more likely to be found at school than with peers or at home.

An interesting finding for the *Cohesion* theme was the children from both schools were using the outdoors as a place they felt they belonged. Nature helped children to deal with negative emotions or experiences. This important result was not found for parents or school personnel, but it may be an effective resource for increasing resilience.

Being proud of First Nations heritage (under the *Cultural Adherence* theme) was also not mentioned as a factor for promoting resilience for the adults in the study, but for those children who claimed such relationships, it was something that helped them define their identity in a positive way. A recent study that looked at cultural identity and physical and relational aggression among students in a First Nations community in the province of Quebec found that a strong cultural affiliation appears to be protective against these forms of aggression for children of First Nations heritage (Flanagan, et al., 2011).

Anti-bullying programs and resilience. Bullying is a pervasive threat to well-being. When reviewing the literature on school bullying, much of it appears to come from the perspective of school policy, and few studies look at the family perspective. Linda Theron (2016) recently wrote that, "Social ecologies, more so than children themselves, are responsible for facilitating resilience processes in contextually-relevant ways, even though children co-contribute to the achievement of positive outcomes" (p.97). The Character Pillars, as part of the ABAV plan, focus on trying to change internal characteristics of the students, rather than focusing on the need to build the external, environmental resources as described in the research on resilience. This has led to "a gap between teachers' theoretical knowledge of resilience and the practical application of this knowledge in the classroom" (Russo & Boman, 2007, p. 26).

In addition to the issues with the Character Pillars program, the TTFM data from 2014 highlight several concerns. For the rural school, there are some specific questions generated from these data: If there are more girls who are victims of bullying and fewer students overall engaging in positive behaviours at the rural school, how should this information affect the ABAV Plan and current discipline policies? For the suburban school, the TTFM survey data lead to the question: If there are more boys who are victims of bullying at the suburban school, and fewer boys engaging in positive behaviours, how can the ABAV plan and discipline policies reflect this gender disparity?

It is clear from this study that the ABAV Plans are not static entities that are plugged into an existing school system and then allowed to run without interference. When students are 'at-risk' due to multiple factors in their social ecologies, the need for school-based support rises accordingly. Content analysis of the children's interviews indicated that teachers facilitated between relationships and educational resources, cultural adherence, and power and control. Furlong, Sharkey, Quirk, and Dowdy (2011) report that school connectedness (defined as the belief that adults and peers at school care about the student as an individual) promotes positive development for high school students. This study indicates that perhaps teachers could encourage at-risk students to access resilience through activities that provide opportunities (a) to be active, creative, and autonomous; (b) that are non-academic, involve the whole school, promote awareness of differences, and use the outdoors; and (c) that allow for negotiation and for having a voice within the school community. In the feedback sessions that took place after the research was completed, the teachers who participated in the study were able to generate specific applications that were pertinent to their schools and the children's situations based on the research findings.

Methodological Reflections

Researcher experiences. The researcher assistants kept field notes of things that happened and their impressions over the weeks of the project. One of them commented,

> I could really tell during this time how academics can really be associated with behaviours. One of the little boys I sat with started out by telling me that he is so angry he wants to burn down the whole school. I said ok, well, let's work on that anger level. We did a few questions together and once he started getting it I asked him how his anger level was. He told me it's getting better and he feels a little calmer.

They also found that the children "seem to really be affected by their environment" especially in their reactions to noise and lighting.

One of the research assistants wrote in her notes regarding issues with volunteering, "I wonder about the balance between being helpful and creating dependence (in this case, meaning they may not move on to the next question until you are sitting next to them again)". Another assistant reflected on the scrapbooking aspect of the study:

> It seems to potentially be a motivating factor in their projects, which is really great. This scrapbooking part of the project is really interesting, and I think has potential all on its own. Makes me really intrigued about art therapies. It seems the scrapbooking helps them conceptualize and categorize their photos and what themes they want to try and tackle with their photographs. Doing scrapbooking during the process of photo taking is adding a more concrete element to the project that I think the kids are responding well to.

The use of creative expression, such as drawings, has been found to promote recall of past personal experiences for children (Andreou & Bonoti, 2009). It has been suggested that art therapy

is a way for children with special needs to surmount hurdles to education (Cochran, 1996). The observations of the researchers in this project appear to support these concepts.

As researcher and school psychologist, there were constant reminders of a need to maintain awareness of a dual role.

> My main work as a psychologist is with the children, but as a researcher, I am not involved with them directly. Having such rich data from the interviews means that it's a challenge for me distill it all into a coherent narrative. I worry that I am unconsciously assuming others will know the same things that I do.

There were pleasant surprises in the process, however.

> I didn't expect team members to be so consistent in choosing exchanges pertinent to the themes and important to the children, and in the coding of the transcripts. It's been rewarding to get information I feel is so valuable for my community, especially the vulnerable children, and I really hope this work will contribute on a larger scale.

Research challenges. Even though the schools were supportive of the project, there were times when it was not feasible to meet with a child due to illness, a test, or group project, so flexibility was key to collaboration. One of the drawbacks to having to reschedule was the need to re-establish rapport with the students; since the researchers were only at the schools one day a week, every time a session was missed, it meant that a student was not seen for two weeks. Flexibility was necessary in terms of space as well, since school staff needed rooms for specific activities at times.

The discussion feedback from the research team indicated that perhaps the photography aspect would have been more valuable if the project had occurred more than once a week, and that perhaps an added home component, less time restriction, and planning for inevitable scheduling issues, would have added variety to the children's projects. The team considered these limitations and made improvements in these aspects of the research design for follow-up studies.

There were issues regarding family collaboration in the research. When the researcher tried to meet parents at the schools, there were some difficulties with timing. In order to accommodate the parents, offers were made to meet them elsewhere in the community, but in the end, there was no access to three parents except through email, and one parent never responded to requests for an interview. Since the researcher was also the assigned school psychologist, there may have been issues of duality that affected some parents' desire to meet. Active research can have impact like an intervention, and it may be that the role of psychologist affected the consultation and liaison aspects of being a researcher at the same time. However, all the children who presented their scrapbooks had family members show up for the evening exhibitions, and many of them had extended family there, such as grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins. There are strong benefits to producing knowledge that is specifically relevant to the context of the researcher's practice as well as empowering effects for participants (Fleet, Burton, Reeves, & DasGupta, 2016), which outweigh negative aspects.

Researcher bias. An implicit limitation to this type of research is that researchers are more likely to find evidence that is supportive than non-supportive of the theory being investigated. Additionally, while answering probe questions, some participants may get cues to answer in a certain way or agree with the questions to please researchers. When theory is emphasized, researchers can be blocked from giving appropriate weight to contextual aspects. These limitations

can affect trustworthiness (Hsieh & Shannon (2005). According to Yin (2003), high levels of researcher conscientiousness are required to be sensitive to all aspects of the process, including tolerating ambiguous data or circumstances. Therefore, researcher bias was monitored through asking clarifying questions and avoidance of leading and closed questions, and by using the participants' language. Through careful review of the data looking for similarities, differences, discrepancies, alternative explanations, extreme and 'other' cases, as well as keeping an audit of all documents and processes, it is hoped that any researcher effects were recognized and incorporated appropriately into the analysis of data.

As researcher and participant-observer, the researcher tried to monitor and disclose assumptions and possible biases with regard to perspectives of the presented themes. External auditors and research collaborators were used to establish inter-rater reliability for the coding of themes. An audit trail was also kept through diary entries regarding interview schedules and times, such as recommended by Brantlinger and his colleagues (2005).

Because of the researcher's immersion in the child's world and with the people in the environment who support him or her, it was important to be consciously and continuously aware of the potential differences in orientation between researcher and practitioner towards the phenomenon under investigation, as well as any expectations regarding the purpose of the study and procedures used. For example, Ungar (2011) references Rutter's (1987) work, whose list of protective processes includes one of the researcher's personal biases, that changing the personal meanings of negative experiences can increase resilience to those experiences.

Limitations and Future Directions

The focus on Character Education (building dimensions of personality traits such as caring) as the heart of the ABAV plans for the schools does not translate for vulnerable children into increased resilience according to global research (Masten, 2014):

> There is evidence that experiences shape personality traits, that traits can influence exposure to adversity, and also that the same trait can function as a vulnerability or protective influence, depending on the domain of adaptation, the physical or sociocultural value and meaning of the trait, and the age or gender of the individual. (p.14).

Hence, the child in this study who was identified as being a chronic victim of bullying who stated, "I put others' needs before mine – I care about other peoples too much" (Child I).

Although this study defined the resilience themes based on previous research that was done with vulnerable youth across several countries (see Ungar, 2011), it is important to remember that these definitions may be very different for, and individual to, each child who participated. It is a challenge to be aware and actively strive not to impose previous understandings on their conceptions. Therefore, several viewpoints were used to reach consensus as part of content analysis; the researchers knew to be careful when assigning comments to the seven themes that they arose naturally from the child's discussions. For example, it was easy to find pertinent examples relating to *Social Equality* where the children did not act in the way the schools teach this concept, but rather how the children expressed it: "I was hitting a lot of people [because] they not doing, respecting the rules of the bus" (Child H). Another child explained to the researchers that he pushed a child to the ground in order to prevent someone else from being hit and was quite

indignant at receiving a detention. Both these children thought they were protecting others who were vulnerable, rather than engaging in bullying behaviours.

Another limitation relates to context-specificity, or the extent to which an underlying theory presented in one context has the ability to generalize when presented in an intervention program (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). One of the core human needs is that of relationship with another person. The data from this study clearly shows that relationship is the central concept for accessing resilience building resources for children at risk due to learning difficulties and involvement with bullying. When these children engage in bullying behaviours, the school's reactions are often that of isolation and separation through detentions and suspensions. The children are asked in their exclusion to 'reflect' on their 'choices', but to call it a choice when they have hurt another person not only implies a level of understanding and motivation that these children do not have, but it also comes across as blaming and shaming. In the Social Equality examples given above, it appears that some of these children are being aggressive due to their perception of being protectors of other vulnerable students, which leads to feelings of, "It's not fair," when they receive consequences.

Theron (2016) stated,

> Assumptions of such supports being universally effective and homogenous approaches to school-based support of resilience do not align well with the details of children's contextualized lives. Thus, application of broad evidence is likely to eclipse context-specific elements of support and result in inexact, and consequently, sub-optimal, support of resilience. (p.94)

Therefore, there needs to be a paradigm shift to help these children repair broken connections to others. It seems clear that these children need to be taught about connections and

concretely how to make them, maintain them, repair them, and sustain them. This is not done through broad-based school-wide programs that talk about abstract concepts such as trust and fairness. These children cannot take the general ideas presented to them and make them specific to their situations except with concrete modeling and explanations. It may appear that the intervention mantra posted in the hallway, "Own it, fix it, learn from it, make restitution," is not appropriate to bring awareness to, and change for, some of the children who bully. The reality is their perceptions seem to stop the change at the first step, "Own it: the student must admit what they did wrong" (ABAV Plan, suburban school, Rules of Conduct and Safety 2014-2015). This is very challenging, hence, the child who called another child names in one of the sessions thought he was teasing and making a connection, although that was not how the others around him perceived it.

As recommended by Murray-Harvey and Slee (2015), the findings from this study indicate that more needs to be done to help teachers recognize and act on children's internal distress. The disconnect between teachers and parents reaches further than their perceptions of the children's emotional pain and appears to be systemic for responses to bullying involvement. In other words, teachers need to recognise that (a) children who engage in bullying behaviours can be victims as well, that (b) parents need to see consistent response to bullying behaviours, and that (c) the assumptions that parents understand and are supportive of the schools' ABAV Plans are not justified without ongoing home/school dialogue. Further research into improving the perceptions of school personnel and parents towards each other may help reduce the challenging aspects of their relationships.

There were some important differences discovered between the two schools. At the rural school, the staff focus appeared to be more on the individual and his or her context, which led to

strong relationships between the children and the school personnel. At the suburban school, the focus seemed to be on rule compliance, and the relationships between the staff and the children was weaker. It would be worthwhile to investigate the role that these diverging views have on students' emotional connections and rates of involvement in bullying.

It would be beneficial to look more closely at the role that gender identification plays in behaviour difficulties, and what role gender plays in terms of social equality issues at the elementary school level. According to the TTFM survey, the students reported more girls being bullied at the rural school, but more boys said they were bullied at the suburban school. What are the interactions between gender and other contextual factors, such as socio-economic status and access to mental health resources that lead to such differences in reports of bullying behaviours? Gender identity was also an issue for two of the three girls in the study, who claimed to be "more like a boy" (Child B and Child G). What might link gender association and involvement in bullying?

Having a child with a disability impacts family life to varying degrees, and parents may not be able to protect their children from difficulties arising from interactions with peers (Worcester, Nesman, Raffaele Mendez, & Keller, 2008). It would be helpful to understand the relationship between family support and access to resources for children with learning difficulties from the perspectives of parents, especially for those children who are experiencing bullying.

Practical Implications

As the findings from this study attest, what really makes a difference in promoting resilience are the key relationships within the various levels of basic adaptive systems. Knowledge has to take place within a meaningful relationship to make an impact, and the essential element for

positive school climate is the relationship between teacher and student; ensuring that each student has a relationship with at least one adult at the school is a powerful strategy (Weissbourd, Bouffard, & Jones, 2013). School psychologists have the potential to influence teachers through the provision of data-based information and review of best-practices; clarity in the sharing of concerns and information from teachers to psychologists would enable appropriate support.

Behaviour problems are usually addressed by well-intentioned adults through enforcement of ineffective 'zero tolerance' policies, or engagement in punitive reactions that do not teach appropriate and constructive behaviours (Weissbourd, Bouffard, & Jones, 2013). These children do not know what to do when they do not know what to do. Integrating social and emotional learning (SEL) programs into daily life at school has been proposed as a way to effectively increase the skills children need to succeed in emotional, interpersonal, and cognitive domains. Effective SEL programs use sequenced activities that are clearly connected to skill development, employ active learning strategies, incorporate social aspects, and target specific areas (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). The director of research for Harvard's Making Caring Common project, Luba Feigenberg, has reported that studies show "the most successful 'kindness strategies' are short and focused, rooted in relationships, carried out repeatedly, and related to actual events in school" (Flanagan, 2017, para. 8).

This study found that the concepts of resilience and vulnerability are like two sides of the same coin. When the children were asked, "What are you good at?" they listed things they could not do; when asked, "Who can you count on?" they replied with the relationships that were challenging for them; when asked about fairness, they spoke about things they felt were not fair. Yet they all still mentioned things, people, and places that were positive in each area. Although

there is strong evidence of ongoing contexts of adversity for these children, they all showed resilience as it has been defined for this research.

Recommendations to schools. In this study, the children were able to access resilience when they were given specific and meaningful tasks to do within the school, and when they were able to participate in ways that did not require academics. It was clear from observations and comments that difficulties with academics were linked with behaviour problems. The finding that 'at-risk' students were aware that they are not receiving awards suggests that publicly recognising and celebrating other ways that these children engage positively at school might be an effective way to decrease negative behaviours. It was apparent that resilience may be promoted through relationship-based activities that allow for creative self-expression, perhaps through exploration of cultural identities and practices.

Currently, the resource team mentions the child's likes, interests, and skills in one of the introductory sections of his/her IEP, but the accommodations do not always reflect this awareness. It would be helpful for a child who has difficulty expressing their ideas either orally or in written form to be able to use a more creative form of expression, for example drawing, which all ten children in the study endorsed as something they enjoy or are good at doing. The same visual-elicitation strategies used in this study also might be used to access the children's underlying ideas.

For children with learning difficulties, positive connections are made through physical acts, not through writing or speaking. Doing an act of service should be the first step after recognition that something has occurred to break connection with another person. This does not only apply to acts of bullying; according to psychotherapist Stan Davis, victimized youth need to be encouraged

to use legitimate occasions for serving others, as this helps them to rise above their own situations. It also helps the students to recognise that others' intentions are not fixed (Davis, 2012).

According to one parent in this study, empowering children with protector roles, backing them up when something happens, and having all parties see clear consequences to bullying, are essential to providing these children with the desire and ability to access resources that will strengthen their resilience. This is in line with recent research reiterating that an individual's resilience depends on the resilience of other interdependent systems in the child's life (Masten, 2014). The children's sense of identity can be bolstered through having meaningful assignments within the schools and participating in extra-curricular activities or special interests under the direction of a specific teacher. Indeed, there is a clear relationship between school connectedness and reductions in bullying according to a recent research review (Sung Hong & Espelage, 2012).

According to Yeager and Dweck (2012), the best way to foster resilience is to praise the students for the process they used; for example, the effort, strategies, focus, or persistence that they showed while working. When they are not able to accomplish a task, show them better strategies. Putting the emphasis on process rather than ability helps students respond with resilience to their difficulties. As they have pointed out, "It is not only the presence of social and academic adversity that determines a person's outcomes but also a person's interpretations of those adversities" (p.303). Vannest, Reynolds, and Kamphaus (2015) recommend Incremental Change Theory Training, which is based on growth mindset, for the prevention of and intervention for bullying. In this study, teachers were found to be the most important resource for children's perceptions of power and control therefore, they have the possibility to help children see their own potentials and that of others.

The findings of severe and chronic suicidal thinking and anxiety were quite concerning. Mental health initiatives that look at contextually appropriate priorities for families, using evidence-based programs, have the potential to cultivate resilience for children and their families (Leadbeater, et al., 2013). This study revealed that resilience is fostered at school through consistent relationships with people whom children believe they can trust with their feelings.

The physical environment is also important to help these children connect with resilience; using the outdoors and monitoring noise levels and lighting were all found to help children cope with negative emotions or experiences. Having access to a 'safe space', such as the school library, is also an important environmental consideration.

Summary

Bullying is prevalent among children with learning difficulties, both for victimization and for bully behaviours, and is a priority concern for schools (Beaumont, 2010). Understanding the perspectives of students, their parents, and school staff regarding resilience can help in the planning and implementation of programs and interventions designed to protect vulnerable children from the negative effects of adversity. As seen in the literature, resilience has been found to depend on eco-systemic processes that involves families, schools, and communities. The use of visual methods, especially photo-elicitation, is an ethical choice to help provide vulnerable students with learning difficulties with an aid for self-expression that can access personal and contextual meaning regarding resilience.

Previously identified themes of resilience based on international research were used as a basis for investigating the perceptions of resilience: these were Educational Resources, Relationships, Identity, Power and Control, Cultural Adherence, Social Equality, and Cohesion.

Directed content analysis was used to understand these themes from the perspectives of ‘at-risk’ children, their parents, and school personnel who work with the children regularly. Prevention plans and interventions that focused on changing children’s characteristics rather than meso-systemic influences did not lead to increases in resilience. However, key relationships allowed for both vulnerabilities and strengths to be safely expressed.

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Appendix A

Seven Tensions, source: Ungar et al., 2007, p. 295.

Tension	**Explanation**
1. Access to material resources	Availability of financial, educational, medical and employment assistance and/or opportunities, as well as access to food, clothing and shelter.
2. Relationships	Relationships with significant others, peers and adults, within one's family and community.
3. Identity	Personal and collective sense of purpose, self-appraisal of strengths and weaknesses, aspirations, beliefs and values, including spiritual and religious identification.
4. Power and control	Experiences of caring for one's self and others, the ability to affect change in one's physical and social environment in order to access health resources.
5. Cultural adherence	Adherence to one's local and/or global cultural practices, values and beliefs.
6. Social justice	Experiences related to finding a meaningful role in community and social equality.
7. Cohesion	Balancing one's personal interests with a sense of responsibility to the greater good; feeling a part of something larger than one's self socially and spiritually.

Appendix B

Meeting Agenda

Overview of Participatory Action Research

Introduction: Through media it is possible to capture and share the realities of certain people within a community. Visual storytelling is an action research method that allows those participating to be more empowered during research.

In order to gain a deep understanding of the students' perceptions of resilience (the ability to recover after setbacks or negative experiences), this action research project is based upon community partnership, where everyone has an active role in the process as co-researchers, helping us explore the strengths and resources that are important to people and their community.

Photography captures individual realities in a way that is easily shared to raise awareness on the issues and strengths of the community. In-depth interviews about the photographs access the underlying stories that affect the perspectives of the community. Overall, this project's goal is to give a voice to students' positive perceptions.

Project Considerations to Discuss:

Themes

In school:

1) Access to material resources, specifically educational resources: "I learn…";

2) Relationships that are significant: "I can count on…";

3) Identity from self-appraisal of strengths: "I am good at…";

4) Power and control, such as the ability to affect change: "I can change…";

5) Cultural adherence: "I am proud that…";

6) Social justice, specifically the idea of equality: "Fairness is…";

7) Cohesion, or feeling part of something: "I belong to…"

Suggestions?

Summary of Procedure:

Total of 10 weeks with students

Week 1 – Introduction: Learning about the camera, generating ideas about what the themes mean; prioritizing themes for photo taking.

Week 2 – Theme 1

Week 3 – Theme 2

Week 4 – Theme 3

Week 5 – Theme 4

Week 6 – Theme 5

Week 7 – Theme 6

Week 8 – Theme 7

Photo Prep: Week 9 & 10 – Putting it all together for the photo exhibition

Feasibility

Time constraints

Meetings at lunch?

Individual interviews regarding chosen photos? (Record children's comments while they are taking pictures?) "Tell me what you want me to know about this."

Teacher support for project

The Approach

To Students

We are curious about things that are positive for kids at school

What do you think is important to know about things that are positive at school?

Creation of individual scrapbooks and presentation to invited guests at conclusion of project.

To parents and teachers

Project designed to understand how students are seeing their strengths and resources, especially after receiving support to improve their experience.

Students choose one photo per week to bring home and show parents (To increase parental awareness and engagement in the project)

Evaluation of the photo project

Teacher focus groups pre/post (see Appendix F)

Parent Interview Questions (see Appendix G)

Asking students about their experience of the project

Appendix C

School Personnel Consent Form (Revised)

The Perceptions of Resilience of Children with Learning Difficulties Who Have Been Involved in Bullying

CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

This is to state that I agree to participate in a program of research being conducted under supervision of Dr. Hariclia Petrakos of the Department of Education of Concordia University (telephone: 848-2424, ext. 2013; email: hpetrakos@education.concordia.ca). You may also contact Janet Strike Schurman, Doctoral Candidate of the Department of Psychology of Université de Sherbrooke and School Psychologist (telephone: 450-691-1440 ext. 218, email: jschurman@nfsb.qc.ca) or Cassandra Monette, Research Assistant, Concordia University (telephone: 514-265-2043, cassandra.monette@gmail.com)

PURPOSE

I have been informed that the purpose of the research is: to explore children's perceptions of their strengths and resources (people, places and things) that may help them avoid or cope with bullying situations, through photographic storytelling; to explore teachers' and parents' perceptions of the students' ability to recover from setbacks or negative situations. This information will help schools increase a positive climate for all students.

PROCEDURES

I have been informed that the procedure is the following: The data collection will take place over the spring of the 2014-15 school year. The following information will be collected:

a) Information regarding the identification of a learning difficulty;

b) Information whether the student has had any issues with bullying;

c) Child interviews regarding photos they have taken will be used to understand the children's perspectives of their strengths and resources;

e) Teachers and other school personnel will be invited to partake in 2 focus groups (Fall 2014 and Spring 2015) to give their views about these students' strengths and use of resources, and discuss themes about anti-bullying programs and their impact on students, parents, and teachers.

The children will participate in a 10 week photography project in the spring (February – May 2015) using photography as a means to access what is important to them. Themes will be assigned each week and will center on their strengths and use of resources. Photo-sessions will be done at lunch time and will be audio-taped. The difference between photo session taping and photo interviews is that the interviews are semi-structured, whereas the photo sessions record the child's spontaneous comments relating to their choice of photo (previous studies using this methodology found that children often will not repeat themselves and valuable insight into the reason the photos were chosen may be lost). Each week the researcher will interview the children about their photos (photo interviews). Care will be taken to ensure that the children are not inconvenienced and disadvantaged by being taken out of class.

I will allow Janet Strike Schurman, school psychologist and researcher, to conduct the photography project with participating students from my class.

I will also participate in two audio recorded focus group interviews (Fall 2014 and Spring 2015).

CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

• I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time without negative consequences.

• I understand that my participation in this study is CONFIDENTIAL (i.e., the researcher will know, but will not disclose my identity). All the information that all the participants share is also confidential and private, unless the children are unsafe in any way. In that case, any concerns will be reported to the school principal.

• I understand that the data from this study may be published.

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT. I FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

NAME (please print)

_____

SIGNATURE

_____

If at any time you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Adela Reid, Research Ethics and Compliance Officer, Concordia University, at (514) 848-7481 or by email at areid@alcor.concordia.ca, or M. Olivier Laverdière, Chair of the Research Ethics Board (le president du comité d'éthique de la recherche), Lettres et sciences humaines de l'Université de Sherbrooke : 1-800-267-8337 poste 62644, or by email at cer_lsh@usherbrooke.ca

Appendix D

Parent Invitation (Revised)

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s)

I am a Doctoral Candidate from the Department of Psychology at Université de Sherbrooke. I work as a school psychologist with your child's school board. I am interested in exploring children's perceptions of the positive things in their experience at school through photographic storytelling. I am also interested in teachers' and parents' perceptions of the students' ability to recover from setbacks or negative situations. This project will look at children with learning difficulties and their perceptions of their strengths and resources (people, places and things) that may help them in avoiding or coping with bullying situations.

When you consent to participate in this study, data collection will take place over the spring of the 2015 school year. The following information will be collected:

a) Information regarding the identification of a learning difficulty; b) Information whether the student has had any issues with bullying; c) Child interviews regarding photos they have taken will be used to understand the children's perspectives of their strengths and resources; e) Teachers and school personnel will be invited to partake in 2 focus groups (Spring 2015) to give their views about these students strengths and use of resources, and discuss themes about anti-bullying programs and their impact on students, parents, and teachers.

With the help of a research assistant, Cassandra Monette, the children will participate in a 10 week Photography project in the spring (February – May 2015) using photography as a means to access what is important to them. Themes will be assigned each week and will center on their strengths and use of resources. Photo-sessions will be done at lunch time and will be audio-taped. The difference between photo session taping and photo interviews is that the interviews are semi-structured, whereas the photo sessions record the child's spontaneous comments relating to their choice of photo (previous studies using this methodology found that children often will not repeat themselves and valuable insight into the reason the photos were chosen may be lost). Each week the researcher will interview the children about their photos (photo

interviews). Care will be taken to ensure that the children are not inconvenienced and disadvantaged by being taken out of class.

One of the potential benefits of this project is student empowerment (giving the student the ability to choose how to express themselves regarding things that are important to them). Photography is a tool that can help give a voice to the student's stories.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact me, Janet Strike Schurman, at 450-691-1440 ext. 218 or Dr. Hariclia Petrakos at 514-848-2424 ext. 2013.

Sincerely,

Janet Strike Schurman, Project Researcher and School Psychologist

Hariclia (Harriet) Petrakos, Ph.D. Research Supervisor and Associate Professor, Concordia University

Appendix E

Parent Consent Form (Revised)

The Perceptions of Resilience of Children with Learning Difficulties Who Have Been Involved in Bullying

CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

This is to state that I agree to have my child participate in a program of research being conducted under supervision of Dr. Hariclia Petrakos of the Department of Education of Concordia University (telephone: 514-848-2424, ext. 2013; email: hpetrakos@education.concordia.ca). You may also contact Janet Strike Schurman, Doctoral Candidate of the Department of Psychology of Université de Sherbrooke and School Psychologist (telephone: 450-691-1440 ext. 218, email: jschurman@nfsb.qc.ca) or Cassandra Monette, Research Assistant, Concordia University

A. PURPOSE

I have been informed that the purpose of the research is: to explore children's perceptions of their strengths and resources (people, places and things) that may help them avoid or cope with bullying situations, through photographic storytelling; and to explore teachers' and parents' perceptions of the students' ability to recover from setbacks or negative situations. This information will help schools increase a positive climate for all students.

B. PROCEDURES

I have been informed that the procedure is the following: The data collection will take place over the spring of the 2015 school year. The following information will be collected:

a) Information regarding the identification of a learning difficulty;

b) Information whether the student has had any issues with bullying;

c) Child interviews regarding photos they have taken will be used to understand the children's perspectives of their strengths and resources;

e) Teachers and school personnel will be invited to partake in 2 focus groups (Spring 2015) to give their views about these students' strengths and use of resources, and discuss themes about anti-bullying programs and their impact on students, parents, and teachers.

f) I will participate in a one-on-one interview to discuss my perceptions of my child's strengths and use of resources, as well as the impact of the school-wide anti-bullying program (Spring 2015).

The children will participate in a 10 week photography project in the spring (February – May 2015) using photography as a means to access what is important to them. Themes will be assigned each week and will center on their strengths and use of resources. Photo-sessions will be done at lunch time and will be audio-taped. The difference between photo session taping and photo interviews is that the interviews are semi-structured, whereas the photo sessions record the child's spontaneous comments relating to their choice of photo (previous studies using this methodology found that children often will not repeat themselves and valuable insight into the reason the photos were chosen may be lost). Each week the researcher will interview the children about their photos (photo interviews). Care will be taken to ensure that the children are not inconvenienced and disadvantaged by being taken out of class.

C. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

• I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my child's participation at any time without negative consequences.

• I understand that my child's participation in this study is CONFIDENTIAL (i.e., the researcher will know, but will not disclose my child's identity). All the information that all the participants share is also confidential and private, unless the children are unsafe in any way. In that case, any concerns will be reported to the school principal.

• I understand that the data from this study may be published.

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT. I FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO HAVE MY CHILD PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

NAME (please print)

_____

SIGNATURE

_____

If at any time you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Adela Reid, Research Ethics and Compliance Officer, Concordia University, at (514) 848-7481 or by email at areid@alcor.concordia.ca, or M. Olivier Laverdière, Chair of the Research Ethics Board (le president du comité d'éthique de la recherche), Lettres et sciences humaines de l'Université de Sherbrooke : 1-800-267-8337 poste 62644, or by email at cer_lsh@usherbrooke.ca

Appendix F

Focus Group Script

Teacher and School Personnel Focus Group Script

An open-ended group interview with teachers and school personnel focusing on perception of the students, their strengths and use of resources, as well as the impact of anti-bullying programs.

Perceptions of these students

Tell me about the children you work with.

What is it like in class?

How do you feel about them as learners (learning difficulties)?

What is the best thing about working with these students?

Tell me about your experience of their use of resources.

Impact of the anti-bullying program on students, parents, and teachers

Tell me about the anti-bullying program the students are receiving.

Have you noticed any impact? If so, describe what you noticed (for the students? Parents? Teachers?)

What do you feel is most valuable? Why? (for the students? Parents? Teachers?)

Appendix G

Parent Interview Script (Revised)

An open-ended interview with parents focusing on perceptions of their child, their child's strengths and use of resources, as well as the impact of anti-bullying programs.

Perceptions of the child

Tell me about your son/daughter.

What is it like at home?

How do you feel about him/her as learners (learning difficulties)?

What is the best thing about living with your child?

Tell me about your experience of his/her use of resources.

Impact of the anti-bullying program on students, parents, and teachers

Tell me about the anti-bullying program your son/daughter is receiving at school.

Have you noticed any impact? If so, describe what you noticed (for the child? Parents? Teachers?)

What do you feel is most valuable? Why? (for the child? Parents? Teachers?)

Appendix H

Photo- interviews

An open-ended interview was conducted with the child to collect data on students' opinions on issues of resilience. At the end of a photography session, the child was asked to choose two or three photographs that are most important to him or her and to describe each of them.

Examples of open-ended questions:

Tell me about this picture.
- What is the subject of this photo?
- Why is this picture important for you?

Why did you take this photo?
- Why did you choose this picture?

How do you feel about this photo?

Who do you want to show this image?

What do you want them to know about this photo?

Appendix I

Example of Coded Transcript

This appendix comprises an excerpt from the coded transcript of the interview conducted with Child G, Week 8: Scrapbooking Session.

The initial resilience themes are found in Appendix A. The codes were developed to operationalize resilience. The columns to the right of the transcript list the initial codes according to Level 1: Theme (e.g. Identity = IDENT.; Cohesion = COHES.; Cultural Adherence = CULT.; Relationships = REL.), followed by Level 2: Subcategories (e.g. Activities = ACT.), and Level 3: Associated Concepts (e.g. Positive = POS.; Negative = NEG.)

Reference to the codes listed demonstrates the style of coding used in the initial data analysis. The interviewer comments and questions are presented in CAPITALS, whereas the child's responses are presented in lowercase.

WHAT MUSIC DO YOU LISTEN TO?			
Rap, Metal, and Hip Hop.			
OH, YEAH? WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE?			
I don't know. Hip Hop.	IDENT.	HOBBIES	POS.
HIP HOP?			
But like my mom, it sorta runs in the			
family – Country.	COHES.	FAMILY	
SHE RUNS IN A WHAT? I DON'T UNDERSTAND.			
Like the family, the family that I have, they really			
like Country, but I don't.	COHES.	FAMILY	NEG.
AH, OKAY.			
Like I sort have – I'm forced to listen to it. And my			
mom's like, how do you not like Country?	CULT.	ACT.	REL.
And you sing all the songs and you know the lyrics.			
Because you play it 24/7! Oh, so that means you			
like it. No, I do not.			

Appendix J

List of Acronyms

ABAV	Anti-Bullying Anti-Violence plan mandated by the Quebec Education Act
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
APD	Auditory Processing Disorder
EHDAA	élèves handicapés ou en difficultés d'adaptation ou d'apprentissage
IEP	Individualised Education Plan
LD	Learning Difficulties
MELS	ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport du Québec
NFSB	New Frontiers School Board
NRP	Negotiating Resilience Project
ODD	Oppositional Defiant Disorder
OPHQ	Office des personnes handicapées du Québec
OQLF	Office québécois de la langue française
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PTSD	Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
TTFM	Tell Them From Me school survey